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# LETTERS

FROM

A FATHER TO HIS SON,

ON VARIOUS TOPICS,

RELATIVE TO

LITERATURE AND THE CONDUCT OF LIFE.

WRITTEN IN THE YEARS 1792 AND 1795.

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By J. AIKIN, M. D.

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LETTERS  
FROM  
A FATHER TO HIS SON.

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LETTER I.  
INTRODUCTORY.  
TO A. A.

YOU have now, my dear son, nearly finished an education which has been conducted upon a plan best adapted, according to my judgment, to the present state of things, and to the situation you are destined to occupy. It has been a varied and extensive plan, comprising many changes of discipline, and embracing a large field of instruction. It has, I hope, prepared you both for active and contemplative life; for the study of books, and of men and nature. It has, I say, *prepared* you; for the education of

the youth can only be preparatory to the pursuits of the man ; and he who is best enabled, from a comprehensive view of the objects before him, to possess himself of those which are most worthy of his choice, is best educated.

For this reason, I am not afraid of the censure usually passed upon a copious scheme of early instruction,—that it is calculated rather to make smatterers in every thing, than proficient in any thing. Let but a solid foundation be laid of those elemental parts of learning which employ the memory when that is the only faculty in full vigour, and it is immaterial how slight is the superstructure first erected. I would wish it rather to resemble the scaffolding of a great building, than the finished model of a small one. Besides that almost all the branches of knowledge have a mutual connexion and dependence ; it is the only way of preventing narrow prejudices in favour of any one, at the same time to afford a prospect of several, and alternately to exercise the mind upon each. As reasoning consists in the comparison of ideas, the understanding cannot be furnished with too large a store to work

upon. Nor need it be apprehended that confusion will arise from the early mixture of a variety of objects in the mind; or that the time usually allotted for education will prove insufficient for acquiring the principles of general knowledge. The physical character of the mental and bodily frame in youth, is an aptitude for various exertion, but an impatience of confinement to a single one. The mind and body can scarcely at that period be too much employed, provided employment be judiciously varied; and numerous examples have proved, that prodigious acquisitions may be made in very early life, by those who have proper objects presented to them. I know that some have chosen to represent these acquisitions as fugitive, and as calculated rather to make extraordinary children, than distinguished men. This is undoubtedly the case when the studies of youth are laid aside in more advanced years; but when they are unremittingly followed up, I see no reason to doubt that the lead gained at the outset, will be preserved during the course.

You are apprised, as well as myself, that the established system of school and university education in this country, is as opposite as possible to these ideas; but we know that this has happened, not in consequence of a preference founded upon fair comparison, but either of habits and ways of thinking transmitted from generation to generation, or of a necessity derived from the plans of future life. Where honours and emoluments are only to be obtained by particular acquirements, these receive a relative importance, which must continue as long as the same circumstances exist. If Greek and Latin be the only passports from the school to the university; and Greek and Latin still, with antiquated logic, and abstract mathematics, be the means of induction to degrees and fellowships, and thence of admission to lucrative offices in church and state, they will, without question, be the leading objects of attention to those who are educated for the purpose of obtaining these offices. But their value in this case is properly *professional*, and ought no more to form a rule of estimation for persons with differ-

ent views, than the value of legal and medical knowledge to lawyers and physicians.

It is a great advantage attending an unshackled plan of life, that these artificial estimates of things may in good measure be avoided. There is nothing in your destination which obliges you to pursue any other course of study, than that best fitted to enlarge your mind, and store it with the most essentially valuable products of human knowledge. The sciences which will be properly professional to you, those of ethics and theology, stand at the head of such as dignify a rational being. Critical and polite literature is not only valuable for the assistance it affords in the pursuit of those studies, but for the pure and elevated pleasures it is capable of yielding as an ultimate object. The study of nature under her various forms, which cannot but be peculiarly interesting to one who aspires to an acquaintance with the Author of nature, has in it likewise every quality which can render a pursuit delightful. To all these the exertions of your mind will naturally

be turned. Their sources will be alike open to you. You have books, leisure, and friends; but you have no friend who has your improvement more at heart than myself. And as the longer tract I have passed over in the journey of life has, of course given me a more extensive acquaintance with some of its objects than you can yet have acquired, I trust you will not think your time misapplied in perusing the reflections on various topics, instructive or amusing, which I mean to communicate to you in a series of letters. Whether my sentiments do or do not meet with your concurrence, you will, by examining them, be led to that freedom of discussion, without the habit of which no difference exists between *opinions* and *prejudices*.

I am,

Your truly affectionate father,

J. A.



## LETTER II.

## ON STRENGTH OF CHARACTER.

DEAR SON,

IF I can speak experimentally to any moral benefit in growing older, it is, that increasing years augment the strength and firmness of the character. This is a part of the natural progress of the human system, and is probably as much owing to physical as to moral causes. The diminution of mobility and irritability in the animal frame, must fortify it against external impressions, and give it a greater stability in its action and re-action. So far, however, as this is a corporeal process, it cannot be anticipated; and the young must be exhorted to wait patiently for this advantage, till it comes to them in due course of time, to compensate for the many privations they must undergo.

But if an enquiry into the purely moral causes of the opposite defects can suggest moral means of obviating them in some measure at any period, it will certainly be worth the pains; for a due degree of firmness and consistency is absolutely essential in forming a respectable character. Let us, then, enter upon such an investigation.

On retracing my own feelings, I find that the first and principal cause of juvenile weakness is *false shame*. The shame of being singular,—the shame of lying under restraints from which others are free,—the shame of appearing ungenteel,—are all acutely felt by young persons in general, and require strong principle or much native firmness of temper to surmount. Most of the defections from parties and sects in which persons have been educated, originate from this sensation, which is perhaps more seductive to the young, than even interest to the old. It first makes them hesitate to avow themselves, and desirous of passing undistinguished in mixed companies; it next leads them to petty deceptions and compliances; and finishes with making entire converts of them, frequently with an affectation

of extraordinary contempt of those whom they have forsaken, in order to prevent all suspicion of their having been of the number. The best guard against this conduct is a strong impression of its meanness. If young men were brought to discern that cowardice and servility were the chief agents in this progress, their native generosity of spirit would powerfully oppose such a degradation of character. Still more might be gained by accustoming them to set a value upon the circumstance of standing apart from the mass of mankind, and to esteem as honourable every distinction produced by the exercise of freedom in thinking and acting. I am aware that there is a danger to be avoided on this side too, and that the pride of singularity is equally ridiculous and disgusting in a young man. But this, I believe, is not the leading error of the times; which is rather a propensity to submit implicitly to the decisions of fashion, and to value oneself more upon following, than opposing, the manners and opinions of the majority.

The *fear of offending* is another snare to young minds, which, though commonly

originating in an amiable delicacy of character, must in some degree be overcome before a manly steadiness of conduct can be supported. Many instances have I known, in which the species of adulation called by the Latins *assentatio*, has been occasioned by a mere dread of giving offence by contradiction. But such a habit of assenting to every thing that may be advanced, is in danger of subverting all our principles; and we may come to practise from artifice that complaisance which we perceived to be so agreeable, when only the consequence of modest deference. This is an evil attending the practice, otherwise so instructive, of frequenting the company of seniors and superiors; and it is only to be counteracted by a mixture of free society with equals.

Akin to this is *the fear of giving pain*. It inspires an insuperable repugnance to the delivery of disagreeable truths, or the undertaking of unpleasant offices; things which in the commerce of life are often necessary to the discharge of our duty. In particular, one whose office it is to apply *medicine to the mind*, must, as well as the physician of the body, conquer his re-

lucance to give temporary pain, for the sake of affording lasting benefit. Excess of politeness deviates into this weakness. It makes no distinction between saying an unpleasant thing, and saying a rude one. A course of sentimental reading is likewise apt to foster such an extreme delicacy of feeling, as makes the painful duties of the heart insupportable. The most effectual remedy in this state of morbid sensibility, is an unavoidable necessity of mixing in the business of the world, and encouraging all its roughnesses. To persons of a retired condition, the best substitute is strengthening the mind with the dictates of a masculine and high-toned philosophy.

The *desire of pleasing all mankind*, which is the counterpart of the two former principles, is a fertile source of weakness and mutability in some of the best dispositions. It is the quality commonly termed *good-nature*, and perhaps is in some measure national to Englishmen. Young persons are not only themselves prone to fall into excess of easy good nature, but it is the quality that most readily captivates them

in the choice of an early friend. It is impossible here to blame the disposition, although it be highly important to guard against the indulgence of it; for it leads to the very same imbecility of conduct that false shame and cowardice do. In the course of our duties we are almost as frequently called upon to undergo the censure and enmity of mankind, as to cultivate their friendship and good opinion. Cicero, in enumerating the causes which induce men to desert their duty, very properly mentions an unwillingness "*fuscipere inimicitias*," to take up enmities. This is, indeed, one of the severest trials of our attachment to principle; but it is what we must be ready to sustain when occasion requires, or renounce every claim to a strong and elevated character.

When young in life, I derived much satisfaction from thinking that I had not an enemy in the world. A too great facility in giving up my own interest, when it involved a point of contention, and a habit of assenting to, or at least not opposing, the various opinions I heard, had, in fact, preserved me from direct hostilities with any mortal, and, I had reason

to believe, had conciliated for me the *passive* regard of most of those with whom I was acquainted. But no sooner did different views of things, and a greater firmness of temper, incite me to an open declaration respecting points which I thought highly interesting to mankind, than I was made sensible, that my former source of satisfaction must be exchanged for self-approbation and the *esteem* of a few. The event gave me at first some surprise and more concern ; for I can truly say, that in my own breast, I found no obstacle to the point of *agreeing to differ*. It was even some time before I could construe the estranged looks of those, who meant to intimate that they had renounced private friendship with me, upon mere public grounds. But enough ! At present, I can sincerely assure you, that I feel more compunction for early compliances, than regret for the consequences of later assertions of principle. And it is my decided advice to you, who are beginning the world, not to be intimidated from openly espousing the cause you think a right one, by the apprehension of incurring any man's displeasure. I suppose this to be done



within the limits of candour, modesty, and real good temper. These being observed, you can have no enemies but those who are not worthy to be your friends.

Adieu !



## LETTER III.

## ON ATTACHMENT TO THE ANCIENTS.

DEAR SON,

YOU cannot but have remarked, that, even at this period, there are many whose attachment to the writers of antiquity is little inferior to that of the critics and commentators who immediately succeeded the revival of literature. Wrapt up in profound admiration of them, they spend their whole time in studying their works, in which they find every species of excellence in its most exquisite degree; and they look down upon the best performances of the moderns, as only humble imitations of the great models which the ancients have set before them. Every deviation from their principles, they consider as a deviation from truth and nature; and

prefer a fault sanctioned by their example, to a beauty not reducible to their standard. How far all this is owing to a just preference, or a narrow prejudice; and if the latter, by what modes of thinking it is principally fostered, cannot be an uninteresting inquiry.

Many writers have employed themselves in drawing particular comparisons between similar works of the ancients and moderns, and I do not mean to add to the number. It will rather be my attempt to deduce from general reasoning some principles by which their comparative merit may be determined *a priori*. This may seem a strange mode of deciding upon objects which are capable of being brought to an actual parallel; but when it is considered how few can come to the examination without prepossessions in favour of individuals, it may be admitted that this method has its advantages. In fact, by the force of early associations, the beauties of our literary favourites strike us as the charms of a mistress do a lover. We can hardly judge of them soberly—we are all enthusiasm, or all coldness. You cannot but have heard, at the recital of the same

piece, some exclaiming, How divine! and others, What wretched stuff!—yet both parties passing for men of taste. Let us then seek a firmer foundation for our judgment.

All philosophers agree, that man is peculiarly characterized as an improveable being, not only with respect to the individual, but to the species. It is true, many causes may for a long time suspend the course of improvement, or even occasion a retrograde motion; nor does the capacity for it in the species extend to every attainment of the individual. Many arts depend so much more upon exercise than upon rule, that the excellence of a particular artist cannot be transmitted to a successor; hence a later age does not stand on the shoulders of an earlier one with respect to them. This is very much the case with the arts of painting and sculpture. In these after the discovery of the technical modes of working, and the existence of models sufficiently excellent to direct the taste of the learner, every advance towards perfection must proceed from individual talents and industry. With

a block of marble and a chisel, and a soul touched with the fire of genius, and habituated to the contemplation of fine forms in art and nature, the Grecian sculptor called into life his Apollo or Venus, and left to future artists only to admire and imitate.

Among the products of literature, poetry has been thought peculiarly to resemble the arts above mentioned, in soon arriving at a perfection, to which after-improvements of the human species could make no addition. Ingenious dissertations have been written to prove, that a simple state of man and nature, as they exist in the first dawnings of civilization, is the condition most propitious to poetical attempts; and, in fact, many of the favourite productions of the muse in various countries date from such periods. This theory, supported as it is by various plausible arguments, is, however, in my opinion, rather elegant than solid. When language and the art of versification had reached to a certain pitch of refinement, that poetry which consisted in the description of natural objects, and of the simple affections of the heart, might, indeed, at

once attain excellence ; and the attempts of a more polished age to improve upon it, might degenerate into tinsel and conceit. Still, however, as nature herself does not alter, and as the simplest manners are always existing among a certain class of mankind, a writer of true taste may at any time excel in delineations of this kind. Instances of this are likely to happen, when, after long periods of refinement, the relish for simplicity comes round again. This seems to be the case among us at present ; and he must be a very prejudiced reader, who can prefer the literary taste of the ages of Elizabeth and the Charles's, to that of the present day, in respect to justness and truth. If the pictures of nature exhibited by a Cowper and many other modern poets be compared with those of any former age of English poetry, I will venture to assert, that they will be found beyond comparison the most chaste and exact. It may here be remarked, that a simple age is never sensible of the merit of its own simplicity ; but, on the contrary, is fond of laying on with profusion all the ornament it possesses. This is universally true of

savages, with respect to the decoration of their persons, and all the little apparatus of their cabins. It is equally true of the language and rude compositions of a people still barbarous, or only rising towards civilization. Their productions, therefore, are less uniformly simple than those of an age which can fully conceive the difference between different styles, and possesses judgment enough to exhibit each in its purity.

But with respect to the higher species of poetical compositions, there can be no possible reason to suppose that excellence in them will be the growth of an early stage of civilization, or that it will not in general keep pace with other choice products of the mind in their progress towards perfection. Uniformity of design will not exist before accuracy of conception,—beauty of arrangement, before a just sense of order,—propriety of selection, before the principle of congruity,—strength and delicacy of sentiment, before a habit of abstract thinking,—splendour of diction, before the large and varied use of language. Unless, therefore, it were in the power of native genius to overcome impossibilities,



we should never expect to see a capital work, combining all the excellencies of plan, imagery, and sentiment, and at the same time free from gross defects, produced in an uncultivated age, or by an illiterate author.

But, however probable the progressive improvement of poetry may appear in theory, it will be said, that its actual progress has not corresponded with this supposition. For this, however, various causes may be assigned, and especially the following. Some works of extraordinary merit, and peculiarly calculated to become popular, appeared at an early period, and obtained such a high degree of admiration, that they became models in their respective kinds, and restricted all subsequent efforts of genius to mere imitation. Thus, from the time of Homer, epic poetry became an artificial composition, whose rules were in reality drawn from the practice of the Grecian bard, rather than from the principles of nature. Lyric and dramatic poetry were in like manner fixed, though at a later period, by Grecian models; so that the Roman writers of similar performances could not be

said to bring any thing of their own to their works. The same shackles of imitation have hung upon the poetry of modern Europe; whence a fair comparison of the powers and genius of different periods is rendered scarcely practicable. The leading species of poetry, like the orders of architecture, have come down to us subject to certain proportions, and requiring certain ornamental accompaniments, which perhaps have had no foundation whatever but the casual practice of the earliest masters; nay, possibly the whole existence of some of the species has had the same accidental origin.

Meantime, the veneration for the ancients has been raised to the highest pitch by this perpetual reference to them as models; and it has been concluded, that works which have engaged the study, and called forth the imitation of so many succeeding ages, must possess a supreme degree of excellence. But after all, their reputation may have been much more owing to accident than is commonly supposed. That the Grecian poets, continually recording the deeds of their countrymen, and offering incense to the na-



tional vanity, should have been held in high esteem at home, was natural. That the Romans, receiving all their literature from Greece should adopt its principles and prejudices, was also to be expected. But that they should transmit them to so large a portion of the civilized world, and this, not only during the period of their domination, but to new races of men, so many centuries after the downfall of their empire, must be reckoned *accident*, as far as any thing in human affairs can be called accidental. Had not the Christian religion established a kind of second Roman empire, even more capable of swaying the opinions of mankind than the first, it is highly improbable that we should at this day have been commenting upon the classical writers of Greece and Rome. It is, indeed astonishing to reflect, by what a strange concatenation of cause and effect, the youth of Christian Europe should be instructed in the fables of Greek and Latin mythology, which were fallen into contempt even before Rome ceased to be heathen. It certainly has not been on account of their wisdom and beauty that they have survived the wreck of so many

better things. They have been embalmed in the languages which contained them, and which, by becoming likewise the depositories of Christian doctrine, have been rendered sacred languages.

But it is time to give you a little respite.

## LETTER IV.

THE FORMER SUBJECT CONTINUED.

FROM the tenor of my last letter, you have, doubtless, perceived the intended application of my argument *a priori*. And without hesitation I avow, that the supposition that any kind of intellectual product will not partake of the general improvement of the mind, under similar circumstances, appears to me perfectly unphilosophical. While, then, it is acknowledged that modern times, in extent and accuracy of knowledge, have far surpassed those periods which ought rather to be regarded as the *infancy* than the *antiquity* of the world, I cannot see why the moralist, the metaphysician, the historian, the critic, the orator, and the poet, too, should not be benefited by the progress. Horace has said, “ that the source of good

writing is good sense;" and what is this, but the result of reason operating upon experience? It may, indeed, be urged, that there are certain topics, upon which, after men in a state of civilization have once begun to think, little additional knowledge can be gained by experimental or scientific processes; and the philosophy of the human mind may be given as an instance. Every man bearing about him, and viewing round him, the subject of this kind of investigation, no length of time or foreign aid seems wanting to enable him to carry it as far as his faculties will permit. And it is probably true, that scarcely any points of moral and metaphysical speculation escaped the acute research of the numerous Grecian schools which devoted their whole attention to studies of this kind; nor at the present day do many of these points seem nearer being settled than they were two thousand years ago. Yet, if the ancients treated them with as much subtilty and ingenuity as the moderns, the latter will, I believe, be generally allowed to have excelled in clearness of arrangement, and solidity of argumentation; so that where certainty is

not now attained, there is great reason to suppose it unattainable. And I can scarcely conceive, that many persons, after making themselves masters of the modern theories respecting the mind, will think it worth while to retrace the labyrinth of *ancient metaphysic*.

The limitation I made of the superiority of modern writers to cases in which the *circumstances were similar*, would probably be made much use of by a zealot for antiquity, who would attempt to shew, that the language, manners, and institutions of the ancients gave them, in a variety of instances, peculiar advantages over the moderns. As to language, however, let the intrinsic pre-eminence of the Greek and Latin be placed ever so high, still, with respect to us, they are dead languages, in which we could not read a sentence so as to be understood, or write a short composition so as not to be ridiculed, by an old Greek and Roman. I am far from charging with affectation those who fall into raptures with the versification of Virgil and Horace, or the numerous prose of Plato and Cicero. I am persuaded that

by long attention they have brought themselves to a perception of somewhat excellent, though it be a different thing from the real excellence. But can it be doubted, that the same attention paid to one's own, or another living language, the true pronunciation and all the delicacies of which may with certainty be known, will afford at least as solid and rational a pleasure? Language and modes of thinking have a close connexion with each other; and where the latter become more accurate and methodical, the former must necessarily improve in force and precision. New ideas must likewise require new words; as knowledge, therefore, advances, languages must become richer, and that, not only in direct terms, but in figurative and allusive expressions. The former is an advantage in accuracy, the latter in eloquence; and it would be a vain attempt to transfuse into classical Greek and Latin the close argumentation of a Hume, and the excursive rhetoric of a Burke.

With regard to the changes which manners and institutions have undergone, though this may, in some few instances, have rendered modern times less favour-

able than the ancient to modern studies, as particularly those to which great emulation was formerly attached by means of public rewards and applauses, yet this cause cannot have operated to any considerable extent upon literature in general. There can never want motives to excel in what is truly valuable; and though the species of encouragement may vary, the effect will be similar. If oratory among the ancients had more scope at the bar, with us it has more in the senate; and that of the pulpit is an entirely new creation. If the plaudits of assembled Greece were animating in a high degree to dramatic attempts, those of a modern theatre, enforced by the solid benefits of a third night, are scarcely less so:—though I do not mean to instance the theatre as one of the best schools of taste; but neither was it in the age of Augustus. Horace, you know, complains that, even among the knights, pleasure had migrated from the ears to the eyes; and the Roman stage might at least vie with those of the Haymarket and Covent Garden, in processions and triumphs. Nay, I cannot but suspect, that in the most brilliant times of Greece, the chorusses



and the whole *jeu de theatre* were more addressed to the love of extraordinary spectacles in a wondering populace, than to the judgment of sober critics.

But I shall not further pursue comparisons between particular kinds of literary productions, at different periods. My purpose was rather to suggest general principles of judging, which might serve as a counterpoise to the prepossessions usually entertained on these subjects. In conformity with this design, I shall conclude my letter with some remarks on the causes which have fostered an unreasonable attachment to the writers of antiquity.

Education has been the primary source of these prejudices. For many centuries, all the literary characters in Europe have been fed and nurtured with the classics, and have employed the best years of their lives in attempting to understand and imitate them. Associations thus cemented, are scarcely ever to be dissolved. Every sentiment of the soul is interested in preserving them, and the passions rise up to defend the decrees of the judgment. Even the practical sciences, which ought to receive lessons from every day's experience,

have for ages been chained to the schools of these early masters. In my own profession, how many writers of real talents do I find, who hesitate to admit a cotemporary truth when opposite to the authority of Hippocrates and Galen. At present, indeed, this servitude is pretty well over in our country; but learned foreigners still take a great deal of unnecessary and fruitless pains to reconcile the maxims of modern experience with the premature dictates of the fathers of physic. Pride concurs with prejudice in maintaining the value of what we have distinguished ourselves in acquiring; and the credit of those acquisitions by which literary honours are obtained, must be supported for the sake of the honours themselves.

This general impression in favour of ancient literature, is subject to particular causes of fallacious judgment. One of these is, the common practice of confounding the merit of the writer with that of his work; as if superior abilities should always produce superior performances. But though the inventor stands higher in the scale of genius than the improver, yet the workmanship of the latter will in

many respects be more perfect than that of the former. This is sufficiently obvious in pieces of mechanism, and other works of mere utility; where it would be thought a strange prejudice to prefer the original draught of the most ingenious artist, to the improved copy of his journeyman. And why should not the same observation apply to the mechanical parts, at least, such as the plan and disposition of a literary design? Although the article of classical faith, that “Homer was the greatest poet who ever existed,” be admitted in its full extent, the general superiority of the *Iliad* to the *Æneid* or *Paradise Lost*, will not follow as a legitimate consequence.

Another deception is, confounding the merit of a performance with its casual value. Every thing which conveys information of the manners and sentiments of a remote age, is a fit subject for liberal curiosity; and those remains of antiquity which abound in such information deserve the attentive study of the philosopher as well as the philologist. But this value, in many cases, arises more from the faults than the excellencies of a writer, whose

minute details of common occurrences, or references to idle and extravagant fables, may deform his work as a production of genius, while they afford high gratification to the curious antiquary. Had Homer composed another *Iliad* instead of an *Odyssey*; he would probably have exhibited much more sublimity of conception, and grandeur of description, of both which the *Odyssey* contains very faint traces: but we should have lost a copious store of information concerning the arts and domestic manners of that early period, which no other work could supply. The circumstance of language comes under this head of extrinsic value. To trace the progress of men's ideas, by means of the expressions in which they clothed them—to view terms derived from sensible objects gradually transferred to intellectual notions, and simple energies receiving their successive modifications—is highly interesting to the philosophic mind. Hence men of speculation have always been desirous of knowing a multiplicity of languages; and they have read with eagerness very inferior compo-

sitions, if transmitted in the tongue of a remote age.

Further; a foreign, and still more, a dead language, never gives us its matter with exactly the same impressions as we should receive from it in our own. Many beauties are lost, but, in return, many imperfections are concealed. And, in particular, the air of triteness and vulgarity which ever attends performances of inferior rank in our native language, is thrown off by allying the matter with words which can never be quite familiar to us. Many a moral sentiment which would make an ordinary figure in English, strikes us with the force of a deep maxim in Latin or Greek, and dwells on our memory. This, indeed, is a *real* advantage arising from the study of those languages; but it is not to be placed to the account of peculiar excellence in their writers.

To what purpose have I addressed to you all these observations? Most certainly not to persuade you to lay aside your favourite classics, which, besides the solid pleasure and instruction they are capable of affording you, are, in some measure,

professional objects of your studies. Indulge a liberal admiration of their excellencies. Imprint their beauties upon your imagination, and their morals upon your heart. But do not be seduced to regard as models of perfection, what were only the experiments of early art—do not think that the powers of men have declined, while their advantages have increased—and, above all, do not decide by ancient authority, what can be brought to the fair test of modern reason.

Farewell !

## LETTER V.

## ON THE PURSUIT OF IMPROVEMENT.

You have frequently, I question not, been disgusted with the common cant employed against all projects for improvement, "that perfection is a thing not attainable here below—that every thing human must partake of the defects of human nature—that it is a folly to aim at impossibilities"—and the like. This language, which might with equal truth have been held at every stage of human advancement, is therefore equally trivial in all; and he who admits that it would have been an injury to mankind if ten centuries ago it had operated to discourage attempts for improvement, can give no sufficient reason why it would not be so at the present day.

If you consider the persons from whom this strain of declamation proceeds, you will infallibly find it to have its origin in



ignorance, weakness, or selfishness. Often in *ignorance*, the declaimer being neither sufficiently informed of the present state of the art or science to which he refers, nor discerning the means for its further advancement. Often in *weakness*—want of energy of temper and force of understanding to support a vigorous exertion. Oftener than all in *selfishness*, when personal advantages are derived from present defects, which would be endangered by any attempts to amend them. Every generous and elevated spirit will inculcate maxims directly the reverse;—that perfection is the point constantly to be aimed at, whether attainable or not; and that no pursuit beneficial to mankind has hitherto been brought to a state in which it is incapable of further progress. This is admitted to be the case with respect to personal advances in religion and virtue, even by those who are the least inclined to improvement in general—for it is asserted by authority, which they dare not contradict. It is likewise readily acknowledged, with respect to most of those arts and sciences, the free progress of which does not oppose the interests of individuals. And it seems

impossible to assign a reason why the same maxims should not apply to every subject in which the human faculties are engaged, provided it does not relate to things manifestly beyond their reach. If perfection be any where attainable, it would seem to be peculiarly in those institutions which are the creatures of man—in which he has a specific end and purpose in view, involving no wills or powers but his own—which are purely matters of convention between man and man, that may be made whatever he chooses to make them. Such are all the regulations belonging to civil society. In these concerns, if the *end* be first precisely laid down, and if experience be faithfully consulted as to the success of different *means*, it is scarcely possible that continual progress should not be made, as the world advances in reason and knowledge, towards a perfect coincidence of means and end.

You may probably have met with the assertion, that “in the science of politics, all principles that are speculatively right, are practically wrong.” This sentence was the folly of a witty writer, who is much more distinguished for saying lively things

than solid ones. Like other paradoxes, it will not bear examination. It carries a palpable contradiction on its very face; for in a practical science, the proof of the rectitude of its speculative principles is only to be found in their agreement with practice. What should we say of a system of perspective, the rules of which gave every figure false and distorted; or a system of mensuration, by which no one measure turned out right? The reason assigned by the writer for the opposition between principles and practice in the instance he adduces, is, that the principles are founded upon the supposition that man acts reasonably—which he does not. This remark is evidently an ebullition of splenetic satire; but were it just, the legitimate conclusion would be, that the principles were erroneous; for if man be really not a reasonable creature, they erred in representing him as such. To whatever class he belongs, it will not be denied that he is actuated by *motives*; and these motives it is the great business of those who plan systems of law and government to discover. Such systems alone can be speculatively as well as practically right; and in them the

theory can no more be at variance with the practice, than cause with effect. The writer's assertion, therefore, is a mere sophism, which I should not have thought worthy of refutation, had I not observed it triumphantly repeated, as the mature conclusion of a sage in worldly affairs, by persons who concur with him in dislike to appeals to *first principles* in this and some other matters. The truth is, they believe man to be possessed of more reason than they are willing to allow, and it is his reason that they are afraid of.

To resolve things into their first principles is *philosophy*, the noblest employment of the mind, and that which alone confers a title to real *wisdom*. Without a portion of it, the experience of a long life may only serve to accumulate a confused mass of opinion, partly true, partly false, and leading to no one certain conclusion. The want of a philosophic mind makes many men of business mere plodders, and many men of reading and even of observation, mere retailers of vague unconnected notions. Order, precision, concatenation, analysis, are all the results of philosophy. Yet even this word, as you must have re-

marked, as well as those of improvement and reformation, has been the subject of obloquy. It has been branded with the epithet of impious by the bigot, of arrogant by the cautious, and of visionary by the dull. It has drawn down the anathemas of the serious, and the ridicule of the light. Above all, it has been treated with that ironical sneer, which is so common a resource to those who are conscious of being deficient in argument. "Thank heaven! I am no *philosopher*; I pretend not to be wiser than those who have gone before me. I do not boast of the discovery of *new principles*. I must beg leave to retain my antiquated notions notwithstanding philosophers call them *prejudices*."—These flowers of polemical rhetoric, which decorate so many sermons, speeches and essays, though they have lost the attraction of novelty, are yet of no small efficacy in swaying trivial minds; and the *argumentum ad verecundiam* to which they appeal, is apt to overpower unassuming modesty. Such a strain of frothy insolence is best disconcerted by admitting it seriously as an honest confession of inferiority. I would

say—"I *know* you are not a philosopher—I never took you for one—your education and habits of life have disqualified you from all pretensions to the character—your opinions *are* mere prejudices, and do not merit a refutation."

But if there be those who *bona fide* are afraid of philosophy, because very mischievous doctrines have been propagated under its name, let them be told, that what they dread is only the use of reason in a large way, and upon the most important subjects\*; and that if, on the whole, we are better for the gift of reason, though some abuse it, we are likewise better for aspiring to be philosophers, though some falsely and for bad purposes arrogate the title. A very common topic of railing against philosophy, is the extravagant and contradictory opinions held by the ancient schools of philosophers. But with whom ought they to be compared? Not with those who have been enlightened by direct revelation, but with the vulgar and bigots of their own times, who implicitly received all the absurdities which fraud and super-

\* Hujus opus unum est, de divinis humanisque verum invenire.

Senec.



stitution had foisted into their systems of faith. If, by the efforts of unaided philosophy, out of a people thus debased, could be raised a Socrates, an Epictetus, an Antoninus, what honours short of divine, are not due to it? Nor have its services to mankind in later ages been much less conspicuous; for not to insist on the great advancements in art and science which have originated from *natural philosophy*, (since they are questioned by none) what man of enlarged ideas will deny, that the *philosophy of the human mind*, of *law*, of *commerce*, of *government*, of *morals*, and, I will add, of *religion*, have greatly contributed to any superiority this age may claim over former periods? If philosophy thus employed have occasioned some evils, a more correct and diligent use of the same will remove them. If erroneous conclusions have been drawn from a partial or premature induction of facts, they will be rectified by a future more extensive induction. After all, no medium can possibly be assigned between reasoning freely, and not reasoning at all—between submitting implicitly to *any* human authority, and to *none*,



We are placed in this world with a variety of faculties, and of objects on which to exercise them. Doubtless, there are in nature limits which we cannot pass; but what man shall presume to mark them out for other men?—What man shall say to his fellow-men, I permit you to exercise your reason upon these objects, but I forbid you from exercising it on those? Many, indeed, have so presumed; but the friends of truth and mankind have ever resisted their usurped authority.

For you, my dear Son, I do not apprehend that you will be backward in asserting the noblest prerogative of man. Of all improvements, that of your own mind is of the most consequence to you. It is likewise that the most in your power, and in the pursuit of which you will be least liable to thwart the interests and prejudices of others. Remember, however, that the surest mark of progress is a full perception of the disproportion between acquisitions already made, and those which remain to be made.

Adieu!

S<sup>on</sup>  
17

## L E T T E R VI,

ON THE LOVE OF APPLAUSE, EXEMPLIFIED  
IN THE YOUNGER PLINY.

DEAR SON,

IT has for some years been my custom, after the perusal of an author, to note down the general impressions it left on the mind; and this practice, which I began as useful to myself, I have followed with more attention, since I reflected that it might be rendered of some utility to my children. It may therefore not unfrequently happen, that such remarks afford the subject of a letter; and at present I mean to communicate to you my reflections on the elegant and instructive *Epistles of Pliny*.

Dr. Johnson's observation concerning the fallacy of the common notion, that a man lays open his mind without disguise in his familiar correspondence, would be

strikingly confirmed by these letters, provided they could properly be termed *familiar*. But though many of them are addressed to the most intimate friends he had in the world, and relate to personal topics, yet as we know that they were published by the writer himself, after they had undergone his revision and correction, we may be assured that their purpose was not the simple effusion of his mind. In fact, the evident design of almost every letter in the collection is, as we commonly express it, to *set himself off*; for they turn upon some act of munificence which he had performed, some instance of his literary and oratorical reputation, his attachment to study, his philosophical temper of mind, his love of virtue, in short, upon something that may heighten his character in the idea of his correspondent. His leading foible, indeed, the thirst of applause, they very amply exhibit; for he neither wished to conceal it, nor could he do it consistently with his purpose of obtaining applause. But we shall in vain look for any touches of nature which may make us acquainted in other respects with the *man*. Ali is so varnished over with splendid ~~fer-~~

tinents, and elegancies of thought, and expression, that no peculiar features are discernible. The subject of every letter is a *theme*, on which the finest things are to be said; and we are continually tempted to believe, that the benevolent or generous action he relates, was done for the express purpose of displaying it to a friend in its fairest colouring.

Yet since, from the concurring testimony of writers, we know that Pliny was in reality a most exemplary character both in public and private life, another inference to be drawn is, that the love of admiration, how much soever it may deserve the name of a *weakness*, is not on the whole unfavourable to virtue. The desire of praise is a *motive* to do that which we think may deserve praise. This may occasionally, in persons of a corrupted taste, lead to endeavours at excelling in trivial and useless performances; but it can scarcely ever lead to actions manifestly base and flagitious. And on those who have formed a just sense of what is praise-worthy, its operation will be beneficial, by engaging self-love as an auxiliary to virtuous principles.

The age of Pliny abounded in characters of the purest virtue. It would seem as if the shocking and detestable forms in which vice had exhibited herself under the worst of the Roman emperors, had awakened in mankind a double admiration of her opposite. At the same time, the refined civility of the age had softened the rigid morality of the old Romans into a system in which the humane virtues had their proper place. Trained in the best principles, and early imbued with veneration for the noblest characters, Pliny courted the public esteem by an imitation of exalted worth; and if his virtue was not of the complexion of that which can content itself with its own consciousness, yet it was sufficiently founded in habit and conviction, to induce him to *be* what he wished to *appear*. In every age and country, the public will have reason to be amply satisfied, if its men of rank and high office shall be *Plinies*.

The vanity of this writer appears least respectable when it turns upon literary subjects. It was his ardent desire to be thought, not only an excellent pleader and rhetorician, but a proficient in every kind

of composition, prose or verse, light or serious. That his fondness for displaying himself, rendered him extremely prolix; may be judged; not only from his boastful relations of pleadings of five or six hours at a time, and his frequent commendations of *good bearers*, but from his laboured and diffuse panegyric on Trajan. I doubt not that the patient and even applausive attention to his long declamations and recitations, of which he so often informs his friends, proceeded rather from a respect to his character, and a wish to please him, than from the real satisfaction of his auditors. From various passages in his letters we may discover that application was made to this foible by persons who were desirous of ingratiating themselves in his favour. This is the danger of an excessive love of applause;—not that it should vitiate the heart, but that it should corrupt the judgment, and lay a man open to the ridicule of the malignant, and the artifices of the designing.

Farewell !



## LETTER VII.

## ON THE STORY OF CIRCE.

DEAR SON,

THERE WAS a period of criticism in which the works of Homer were supposed to contain an encyclopedia of human knowledge; and every thing of art, science, and wisdom, which after-ages had developed, were asserted to lie in their seeds within the compass of his history and fable. Under this impression, commentators were naturally led to search for recondite meanings in every scene of invention by which he diversified his poems; and particularly they sought to improve the barrenness of his morality, by allegorising his fictions. The double nature of the heathen deities served their purpose very happily in many of these attempts; and there was little difficulty in persuading



the reader that Pallas was wisdom personified in inspiring an action of policy, though a few lines before she had prompted deeds of valour as the martial goddess. Sounder criticism has brought back many of these fancied allegories to simple narratives. Reasoning upon the character of the age in which Homer lived, and the general strain of his writings, it has refused to admit ideas and designs manifestly originating in a very different state of intellectual progress.

You may recollect our reading together the epistle of Horace to his friend Lollius, and admiring the easy good sense with which he deduces lessons of moral wisdom from the writings of Homer. These are, in general, such as any real history filled with a variety of events and characters might suggest; but from the adventures of Ulysses, he selects two as confessedly allegorical,

*Sirenum voces et Circae pocula nosti;*

and the same opinion of them has, I believe, been entertained by all succeeding commentators to the present day. Of the Sirens' song, I do not at this time mean to

take notice; but I shall offer to your consideration some remarks on the story of Circe.

The leading circumstances in this narration, of an enchantress turning men into beasts by a charmed cup, and of a wise man by virtue of a counter-charm resisting the force of her spells, afford so plausible a foundation for a moral allegory on the debasing effects of sensuality, and the preservative power of wisdom, that we need not be surprised at its having been universally received as such. Accordingly, the *Circean cup* has become a phrase in every cultivated language; and the most celebrated poets of different countries have imitated or new modelled the story with the happiest effect. Yet independently of the general argument against allegorical interpretation, drawn from Homer's character of writing, there are in the story itself, when closely examined, such contradictions to the supposed moral design, that we must either give it up as a false notion, or conclude that the author was absolutely void of the judgment requisite for such a species of composition.

Let us trace the outline of the fable.

Ulysses, landing upon the island of Circe, sends a party to explore the country. They arrive at the palace of Circe, who courteously invites them to enter ; and all but Eurylochus comply. She sets before them a mixture of meal, cheese, honey, and Pramnian wine ; the same composition as Nector prepares for the wounded chiefs in the *Iliad*. With this she mixes poisonous drugs ; and after they have all partaken of the refectiion, she strikes them with a rod, and they are instantly transformed into swine. Now, what is there in this that looks on their parts like intemperance or gross sensuality ? Could they have done less than accept a civility which had nothing extraordinary in its circumstances, and in which they did not, as far as appears, exceed the bounds of moderation ? Homer, who is so copious in the praises of hospitality, certainly could not mean to represent it as a fault to partake of the hospitable board ; and his greatest heroes are by no means backward or abstemious on such occasions.

But what follows ? On the return of Eurylochus, who not knowing the fate of

his companions, concluded that they were all murdered, Ulysses bravely resolves to set out alone in order to explore the event. In the way, he is met by Hermes in the shape of a youth, who informs him of the nature and mode of Circe's enchantments; and presenting him with a root called *Moly* as a preservative, directs him, on being touched with the rod, to draw his sword, and threaten Circe with death. "Then (says he) she will invite you to her bed; and do not you on any account refuse the offer, since it will conciliate her kindness: but first bind her with an oath not to plan further mischief against you." Ulysses acts in all points as he was commanded.

What then is this *Moly*? The commentators dare not call it *temperance*—that would be too manifest an outrage to the circumstances of the adventure. They make it therefore *instruction* or *prudence*, and thus are at once constrained to lower the moral to a mere lesson of caution. *Moly*, however, would better express the later doctrine of *election*, and the sinless privilege of the saints: For Ulysses, without any merit of his own, indulges with

impunity in much grosser acts of sensuality than his men had done, who were turned into beasts merely for following the common dictates of nature. The sequel is still more irreconcilable to the supposed allegory of temperance; for Ulysses stays a whole year with Circe, sharing her bed, and making merry with her good cheer, without ever thinking of Ithaca, till his men remonstrate with him, and urge his return. It is observable, that this part of his conduct is exactly that which the Italian poets have attributed to their *intemperate* heroes, who are presented as examples of great virtues with great defects. Critics attempt to obviate this objection to the story, by saying that Ulysses was not intended for a perfect character. But in an adventure meant to exemplify a particular virtue, it would be absurd indeed to make the principal circumstance a deviation from that very virtue.

On the whole, I cannot but be convinced, that Homer in the story of Circe had no other end in view, than in that of the Cyclops, the Laestrigons, and various others, namely, to gratify the passion for novelty and love of wonder belonging to

all ages and all readers, by introducing into the travels of his hero, all those extraordinary narrations which he had learned from tradition, or the reports of mariners. This purpose, so natural in a poet of a rude age, will account, not only for the strange matter intermixed with many of his fables, but for their being introduced at all. He who looks for any better reason for many things that he will find in the early writers, will only sacrifice his own judgment to their reputation.

Your affectionate, &c.



## L E T T E R VIII.

ON NATURE AND ART, AND THE LOVE OF  
NOVELTY.

DEAR SON,

THE English school of the fine arts has distinguished itself from every other, by a more universal reference to *nature* as a standard, and a bolder rejection of principles of *art* long and widely established. Impatient of rules, little endowed with a capacity for ingenious and elegant fiction, but strongly sensible of natural beauty and sublimity, our men of taste have fallen into a peculiarity of manner which has its excellencies and its defects. It has fostered an exact judgment in representations of nature, whether mental or corporeal; it has elevated the imagination with the noblest objects, and touched the heart with the



most genuine passions; but it has narrowed the range of pleasurable sensations, and has inspired a fastidious disrelish of many efforts of ingenuity. By endeavouring to pursue to the first principles of an abstract philosophy every speculation concerning the fine arts, a habit has been introduced, of refusing to be pleased where the source of pleasure could not be fairly traced; and that ductility of soul towards attempts to amuse, which is so happy a preparative to their effects, has been repressed by the pride of reasoning. Perhaps the true philosophy of the human mind has suffered as much from this scrutinizing spirit, as the capacity for enjoyment has done—perhaps the right solution of a fundamental theorem has been missed by looking too far for it. I intend in this letter to offer to your consideration the varied operations of a simple principle, which, I conceive, will explain and justify many things that our national severity of judgment has questioned or rejected.

What is the great requisite in all endeavours to entertain?—*novelty*. Satiated and dissatisfied with things within our daily view, we roam in restless search

after something either absolutely new, or novel in form and degree. This passion, which is in some measure universal to the human race, and which is ever stronger in proportion to the advancement in knowledge and civilization, might, perhaps, by the acute metaphysician be referred to some remoter principle; but practically it is ultimate; and the desires it excites nothing else can satisfy. Instead of asking, "Who will shew us any good?" our cry is, Who will shew us any thing new?—and he who is fortunate enough to be able to do this, is sure of a recompence.

There are two sources from whence this desire seeks gratification; *nature* and *art*. In nature, whatever has never before, or but rarely, been presented to us, affords pleasure on that account, which is greatly enhanced when the object is in other respects capable of exciting agreeable sensations. This is undoubtedly the noblest, the most delicious, and perhaps the most copious source of pleasure; but to many, its enjoyments to any great extent is precluded by circumstances, and probably length of time will exhaust it in all. The

inhabitant of a great city, imprisoned within its walls by business or necessity, can only at second hand receive the impressions proceeding from a view of the grand and beautiful of nature's works. And even the villager, though placed amid the most picturesque assemblage of woods, lakes, and mountains, must inevitably find their charms pall upon his sense, unless supported by new objects of curiosity opening from a closer research into the wonders of creation. It is the same with that part of nature which relates to mind. The ordinary display of passions and interests which we behold in real life and in history, proves at length insufficient to fill our minds. We eagerly look out for more extraordinary characters and events; and at last are compelled to quit nature altogether, and feed our appetite for novelty upon imaginary beings.

To *art* then, in some form or other, we all resort for a remedy of the *taedium vitae*; and national tastes are chiefly characterised by the mode and degree in which it is employed. It is in the arts termed *imitative*, that differences in these respects are most remarkable. It might

have been supposed, that, referring to nature for their archetypes, they could vary only in the greater or less perfection of their imitation. But as this has not been the case, it is evident that these arts must have some additional object. In fact, they are *not*, in general, intended to give exact copies of nature. Their purpose is to heighten her, to disguise her, to alter her, perhaps for the worse, but at any rate to produce *novelty*. Nature supplies the form and feature, but art contributes the dress and air. It is in vain to attempt upon general principles to determine the proportion each should preserve in the combination. For whether the end be to please or to move, to flatter the imagination, or excite the passions, the success of the means will greatly depend upon manners, habits, and perhaps physical diversities, in respect to which no one people can be a rule to another. But I have dwelt too long upon general ideas—let us come to examples.

The *drama* is of all the efforts of art that which approaches the nearest to nature. It has every advantage conjoined, which the others possess singly; and indeed

in some circumstances almost ceases to be a representation, but is the thing itself. Yet how differently have different nations conducted their dramatic spectacles, and how manifestly have they *intended* variation from nature, where copying it would have been obvious and easy. The Greeks, as you well know, wrote all their plays in measure, and pronounced them in recitative with the accompaniment of music, and with regulated gesticulation. They covered the stage with a chorus, which was made privy to the most secret transactions, and interrupted the dialogue by odes of the most elevated poetry. All this was certainly deviating far enough from reality; yet never were the powers of the stage over the passions more conspicuous than in Greece, and never were a people more enthusiastically fond of theatrical exhibitions. In all these points the Romans exactly copied them. Modern nations have in different degrees followed the ancient models. All have adopted verse as the vehicle of tragedy, and most, of comedy. They have, at least in the interludes, associated dance and music. But the Italians, in their operas, have employed

throughout the same artifices of recitative, song, and measured action, that were used by the ancients. A true-bred Englishman laughs at all this, or yawns. Some of our first wits have not disdained to point their ridicule against heroes stabbing themselves in cadence, and lovers expiring with a quaver. But a sensible Italian surely does not want to be told that this is not *nature*. He looks for nature in the story, the passions and the sentiments; but by allying it with the charms of exquisite music and graceful gesture, he feels that he obtains something more, without losing any thing. It may, indeed, require time and exercise to acquire a true relish for such exhibitions, and fashion may have induced many to affect at these spectacles a pleasure which they do not feel, especially when the language of the piece is a foreign one. But I think we cannot, without gross prejudice, doubt that they are capable of exciting genuine raptures, and that, in persons whose sense of propriety is as just and delicate as our own. You know that in this matter I may claim an unprejudiced opinion, at least on the side for which I am pleading, since my



own tastes are perfectly homebred, and my conviction of the power of such arts is founded more on the testimony of others, than on my own experience. I confess, that I was inclined to laugh at the idea of *heroic dancing*, till a friend of mine, a judicious unaffected country gentleman, who had been to see *Vestris* in a serious opera, assured me, that he had received from his action sensations of dignity, grace, and pathos, surpassing any thing of which he had before formed a conception.

What is tragedy among ourselves? Is it not a dialogue in verse, intermixed with all the decorations of poetry?—and is this *nature*? I am aware that English blank verse may be so pronounced, as to be no verse at all; and this supposed improvement was introduced on our stage by Garrick, whose idea of perfect recitation was that of imitating natural speech as nearly as possible. In highly impassioned parts, and especially where short and broken sentences copied the real language of emotion, this mode certainly gave him an advantage in exciting the sympathy of a common audience. But where the writer



was, and meant to be, poetical, I cannot but think that a recitation with the *ore rondò* of Booth and Barry, in which a musical flow was given to sentences by means of returning swells and cadences, with a light suspension of the voice to mark the close of each line, had a finer effect, and better coincided with the purpose of the poet. It is obvious to remark, that if verse is not to be pronounced as such, it is unnecessary to write it; for any pleasure the eye can receive by parcelling out lines into divisions of ten syllables, must be merely childish, unless it originally refers to the ear.

In every country but our own, verse is read with what we call a tone or chant—a sort of modulation between singing and common speaking; as it undoubtedly was likewise by the Greeks and Romans. In this mode of reciting, emphasis is, to our ears, almost entirely lost, as any one will perceive on hearing French verse read by a native. Yet no readers appear more impressed with their subject, or more to interest their hearers, than the French. We always endeavour to preserve the em-

phasis, though often to the total loss of the modulation. Which of these methods is best, cannot easily be determined by general principles, but must be referred to tastes and habits already formed. On the whole, however, that nation which derives the greatest pleasure from its performances, has best attained its end. With this remark, and the corollary—that no one nation can be a competent judge of the verification of another—I conclude my present letter, to resume the subject in the next.

## LETTER IX.

## THE FORMER SUBJECT CONTINUED.

THE train of thought which I have followed, next leads me to consider the *poetical language* of tragedy; another circumstance in which art takes the lead of nature. I know, indeed, that critics have asserted figurative diction to be natural to persons labouring under strong emotions; but for proof of this assertion, I find quotations from Shakespear, instead of appeals to fact. One of these critics, and of no mean rank, has given as an example of the natural playfulness of a lover's imagination, Juliet's fancy of cutting out Romeo all into little stars when he is dead. I do not deny that a certain degree of mental *excitement* (to use modern phraseology) may, like a cheerful glass vivify the imagination, and impart a glow and fluency

of expression; but I never knew a real instance in which violent passion, like intoxication, did not overwhelm the intellectual faculties, and abolish all connexion of thought and choice of language. But tragedy cannot consist of ahs and ohs, of exclamations and broken sentences. Its purpose is to delight, to instruct, to elevate, and above all, to gratify the desire after novelty: the passion of tragedy is therefore necessarily made fluent, inventive, eloquent, metaphorical, and sententious. See how Milton characterises the tragic writers of the Grecian school.

Thence what the lofty grave tragedians taught  
 In chorus and Iambic, teachers best  
 Of moral prudence, with delight receiv'd  
 In brief sententious precepts, while they treat  
 Of fate, and chance, and change in human life,  
 High actions, and high passions best describing.

PAR. REG. iv. 161.

It was evidently after this model, that he framed his *Samson Agonistes* and *Comus*, pieces, however ill adapted for the modern English stage, which will continue to charm and instruct the cultivated reader, as long as the language in which they are written exists. Nor would Shakespear

himself, though peculiarly stiled the *bard of nature*, have afforded a whole school of poetry and morals, had his dialogue been a real pattern of that natural simplicity which is usually supposed to characterise it. To every impartial observer it will be manifest, that his "brief sententious precepts" are generally brought in with effort; and that his sublime and often far-fetched images rather belong to the playwright, than to the speaker. The sweet Racine and the lofty Corneille communicated their own distinctions to all their characters, and were properly "describers of high actions and high passions" in their several styles. In short, if tragedy be not considered as a sublime *poem*, rather than a mere fable to move the passions for a moral purpose, it will be impossible not to prefer the Gamester and George Barnwell to any performance of Shakespear, Corneille, or Sophocles.

It would not be a difficult task to apply this principle of novelty to various other species of poetical composition, and particularly by it to account for the supposed necessity of *machinery* in the Epic, which can scarcely have any other reasonable

purpose than to excite wonder ; but I shall at present content myself with some remarks on its fundamental importance in *Pastoral*.

The nature and design of pastoral poetry have been very differently represented by critics, and their opinions have been respectively supported by appeals to the practice of different writers. I have no doubt, however, that the true secret of the pleasure derived from pastoral, and consequently, of the genuine plan on which it should be written, is an universal longing after a certain imagined state of society, which never did exist, but which may readily be conceived, and by its innocence, tranquillity, and simple delights, sweetly contrasts with the turbulence and evils of the real world. It is no new opinion that this poetry has a reference to the golden age ; but by this age, I would not understand any period recorded by tradition, but rather a kind of Utopia, in which the wounded and wearied spirit of man has ever delighted to take refuge. In this fancied picture, however, there is a natural part ; for such are the real charms of nature, that even imagination can do



no more in decorating a terrestrial paradise, than to collect in one spot, and in their highest perfection, all the delightful productions of different climes and seasons. More has sometimes been attempted ; but the novelty of trees bearing flowers of gems and fruits of gold, has not atoned for its incongruity ; and after all, an orange tree is a more beautiful object. But manners, alas ! must be invented for the scene. The tender passion in a degree of purity it never possessed, content, disinterestedness, benevolence, simplicity, and delicacy, which, if ever they inspired one bosom, certainly never did one hamlet, must concur, along with some alloy by way of contrast, to form inhabitants for the blissful spot. Amid such a faery people, I confess I do not regret *nature* ; nor at my age am I ashamed of losing myself in the Arcadian walks of a Pastor Fido and Aminta. To contaminate a beautiful creation of the fancy with rude manners and coarse expressions, merely because they belong to the miserable shepherds of this actual world, appears to me a wretched attempt at accuracy. Better discard this species of poetry altogether, than



render it the vehicle of disgust. Of what value are the strifes and mean passions of rustics, that they should be decorated with the graces of versification, and make a part of our most elegant amusement? Is it to teach us mankind, and prevent our being imposed upon by false representations? Alas! we know too well that no Arcadia exists upon modern ground, and that vice and wretchedness prevail in the hamlet as well as in the city. But why might we not for a time be indulged with forgetting it?

Pastoral, in the light I consider it, is rural romance. As in the compositions which were once so celebrated under the name of romance, a set of human beings, trained up in fanciful principles, and elevated to the highest scale of imaginary perfection, are engaged in a series of equally extraordinary adventures; so in pastoral, the model of character, and the incidents are derived from a fictitious state of society. The natural circumstances, however, of the pastoral life, accord best with a certain simplicity of language and manners; whence the conceits and quaintnesses in the dialogue of some of the Italian

pastoral dramas, by violating congruity, offend against true taste. Yet, in fact, to refine the language of shepherds from all admixture of grossness, and to decorate it with the simpler graces of sweetness and purity, is almost an equal departure from reality. But without some such accommodation to our longings after a new and better state of mankind, the great end of pleasing cannot be accomplished.

Were I inclined to pursue my subject at length, I might take occasion, from the illustration I have employed, to treat on romantic fictions in general, and to institute a comparison between the old romance, and the modern novel. But not desiring to detain you so long on this topic, I shall only touch upon a circumstance apparently contradictory to that love of novelty on which I have laid so much stress; and this is the preference now so universally given to novels, over the romances which furnished matter so much newer and more marvellous. The reason of this fact seems to be, that we are much more creatures of feeling than of imagination; and that nature being pre-

dominant in our passions, all attempts to excite the sympathetic emotions must succeed in proportion as they approach her standard. I before admitted, that the novelty presented by nature, is of a nobler kind than that produced by art. Uncommon characters and extraordinary events, therefore, which have a natural foundation, will always interest more than those which are wholly artificial. Now, the writings styled *novels*, are intended to impress us like the narrations of real occurrences. They even pretend (however falsely, for the most part) to instruct us in the knowledge of human life. Their effect depends upon a kind of illusion, which makes their personages appear to us like familiar acquaintance, whose sentiments and actions are what we should expect from the circumstances under which they are placed. Romance, on the other hand, transports us into a new creation—a world of wonders, peopled with inhabitants expressly formed for the scene. They have fundamentally, indeed, the passions of men, but so modified by habits of thinking and acting peculiar to themselves, that they do not produce the usual results of those

passions in real life. An Amadis will fall in love as well as a Grandison, but will not love like him, or like any other mortal. Yet even Grandison is not a *common* character, nor is his history a *common* one—and hence the novelty of the fable. It is true, the ordinary run of novels exhibits pictures which are little more than old faces new dressed and grouped; and yet they are perused with avidity by a certain class of readers. But the taste for such reading is a kind of false appetite resembling that for snuff and tobacco, which rather seeks the supply of a want, than the enjoyment of a pleasure.

It is now time to sum up my critical doctrine, which I shall do in few words. This is—that even the pleasure derived from natural objects is considerably dependent on their *novelty*—that art more peculiarly applies to this source of gratification—that even those termed *imitative*, have a purpose distinct from copying nature, which is, the allying it with something new, as the clothing and vehicle—and that with respect to the degree in which these additions may be made with

a happy effect, it depends in great measure upon local habits and associations.

I may, perhaps, hereafter apply these ideas to another topic. At present,

Farewell!

LETTER X.

ON PREJUDICE, BIGOTRY, CANDOUR, AND  
LIBERALITY.

DEAR SON,

AS the professional concern you will have in the opinions of mankind, may sometime or other involve you in controversy, I shall offer to your consideration some reflections on the true import of certain words, than which none more frequently occur in controversial writings, though their application is for the most part extremely loose and undeterminate. The accurate use of terms is in all cases important; but that of the terms in question is peculiarly so, in these times of violent and bitter party contention.

The first that I shall mention is PREJUDICE. This word, according to its deri-

vation, implies a *judgment prior to examination*;—it seems, therefore, on its very face, to bear the mark of rash and unreasonable decision. But in common language, its meaning is frequently softened down into an impression which a man does not scruple to avow, and for that reason probably does not recognize to be wrong. We readily own a *prejudice* against a man or a cause, if we have grounds from experience for thinking ill of them. And as it is frequently necessary, in the occurrences of life, to come to a practical determination in a case where we have nothing, but such a presumption to guide us, we cannot be blamed for following the best lights we are able to procure. Prejudice in this instance is only a reasonable analogy, by which we draw inferences of what will be from what has been. I know that a person has acquired an office or trust by fraudulent means.—I am inclined to credit an accusation of his having exercised it fraudulently. A magistrate has betrayed an outrageous spirit of party virulence.—I suspect that he has been influenced by it in his decision of causes in which party was



concerned. The supporters of a certain system have always avoided discussion, and as much as possible decried the use of reason.—I infer that their system will not stand the test of reasoning. In all these instances, the judgment I form may in strictness be termed a *prejudice*, because it results from preconceptions, not from direct examination of the point in question. But it is censurable only when it prevents me from recurring to such an examination when in my power; and makes me acquiesce in probability when I might have attained certainty.

Prejudice is blameable and unreasonable, when the inferences it draws either do not at all follow from the premises, or not in the degree it supposes. Thus, (with due submission to the science of physiognomy) if I conclude a man to be a knave or a fool from the length of his nose, or the projection of his chin, I suffer myself to be misled by an absurd method of prejudging what cannot be determined by such a rule. Scarcely less false prejudice would there be in the judgment I should form of his character, from his known opinions on speculative points of philoso-

phy or theology. In these instances the conclusions are totally faulty—the two members of the proposition having no more agreement, than in that line of Pope,  
—each ill author is as bad a friend.

In other instances the error is only in degree. A person maintains a system manifestly to my apprehension, destructive of all moral obligation, whence I conclude him to be a man of lax morality. But though this be a natural consequence, it is not a certain one; for daily experience proves, that men may lead the most exemplary lives with principles apparently calculated to produce an opposite effect; such principles either not operating at all, or being counteracted by more powerful ones. National and professional characters lead to erroneous conclusions in a similar degree. When drawn from extensive and accurate observation, they may justly influence the first opinions we form of individuals; but when they are adopted as universal and irrefragable rules of judgment, and render us inaccessible to all proofs of a contrary tenor, they degenerate into the worst of prejudices. Controversies political and religious are pecu-

liarly fullied with prejudices of this kind. Every sect and party has its distinct obnoxious character, impressed on the minds of its violent antagonists, who associate it to every individual of the class, however contrary to the manifest course of his conduct. But I am now got to the confines of another word, which is,

**BIGOTRY.** This may be considered as prejudice combined with a certain malignity. It is not only prepossessed in its judgment, but entertains its prepossessions with passion, and feels impressions of ill-will against those who oppose them. It resists all attempts at confutation with pertinacity and anger. An antagonist, in its estimation, is a *foe*, to be silenced by other means than argument. A bigot never reasons but when he cannot help it, and thinks himself outraged by being compelled to descend into the field of equal contest. At the hazard of discrediting his own strength and skill, he is ready to call out for the civil arm to handcuff or knock down his opponent. After the Earl of Nottingham had written a defence of the orthodox faith against the attacks

of Whiston, and had received for it the solemn thanks of the University of Oxford in full convocation, he attempted to put an end to all further controversy, by introducing into the House of Peers a bill denouncing most severe penalties against any one who should henceforth oppugn the established doctrines. So mean a thing was bigotry even in a noble champion! The bigot requires to be humanized before he is enlightened, and the correction of his heart must precede that of his understanding. Simple prejudice is at once removed by removing the veil which concealed the truth; but bigotry fosters its prejudices as it would protect a child or a mistress. To speak of a *sincere* bigot is tautology, since bigotry includes the idea of sincerity. The bigot is ready to give substantial proof of the reality of his zeal, often amounting to the sacrifice of his dearest interests. On the other hand, the epithets *mild*, *moderate*, *liberal*, *rational*, can never in any degree belong to a bigot. It is not bigotry to be firmly attached to a cause, and to conceive of it as a thing of the highest moment; but it is bigotry to shut the ears against

all arguments on the opposite side, and to refuse others that liberty of judgment which we ourselves assume.

CANDOUR is in some measure the opposite of bigotry; for its essence consists in a disposition to form a fair and impartial judgment on opinions and actions. In the common use of the word we seem to include a leaning towards a more favourable judgment than is strictly true. But this appears to me to be deviating from the proper sense of candour, into that of *charity*, which, as the Apostle describes it, "thinketh no evil." Now, a person cannot have been long and intimately acquainted with mankind, without seeing reason too often to think a great deal of evil of men's motives and principles of action; and if he imputes to them no more than the rules of just inference warrant, I imagine he is not chargeable with the violation of candour.

There is an affectation of candour which I cannot but think very detrimental to the interests of truth and virtue. It is, when in speaking or writing, a complaisant credit is given to men's own exposi-

tions of their motives, in actions which to the common sense of mankind explain themselves upon totally different principles. If the hypocritical cant of morals displayed in manifestos, apologies, declarations, and other appeals to the public in suspicious causes, is, from a notion of candour, to be treated with deference, what must be inferred, but that candour is a very weak, or a very worldly principle? Closely connected with universal profligacy, is universal indulgence; and if excuses are readily admitted to palliate or explain away manifest violations of honour and honesty, the great barriers between right and wrong will be in danger of being overthrown. Certain things which are customarily done, are yet so clearly wrong, that we cannot be made to feel them otherwise without debauching our principles or understanding. If we see men, whose general characters we love and esteem, falling through strong temptation into these errors, it is a much better exercise of candour to dwell upon every virtue they possess, and set it to their credit in counter-balance to one failure, than



to vindicate them from the failure itself, by false reasonings or improbable suppositions.

The word *candour* may, however, be understood, as referring chiefly to the qualities of the heart, and implying that *whiteness* or purity of soul, which inspires the desire of maintaining friendly dispositions towards all mankind; and which in *itself*, at least, finds no cause to judge harshly of others. And the continuance of this propensity through all periods of life is highly desirable, since it will prove the best preservative against virulence and acrimony in controversial debates, and will tend to heal those wounds on social comfort, which bigotry is perpetually inflicting. This spirit is so beautifully described in some lines of Grotius's poem on the death of Arminius, that I cannot refrain from transcribing them.

Cui caritate temperata libertas  
 Certat manere dissidentibus concors :  
 Piaque purus aequitatis affectus,  
 Damnatus aliis, ipse neminem damnat ;  
 Modestiaeque limitem premens, donat  
 Nunc verba vero, nunc silentium paci.

LIBERALITY is a word perhaps of more indeterminate use than any of the former. Its proper meaning, when applied to sen-



timent, seems to be, that generous expansion of mind which enables it to look beyond all petty distinctions of party and system, and in the estimate of men and things, to rise superior to narrow prejudices. From its metaphorical relation to *bounty*, it indicates free allowance, unstinted by rigid rules. The liberal man, like the senate of ancient Rome, is fond of largely extending the relation of fellow-citizenship, and loves to admit all mankind to a fraternal share of the regard of their common Parent. The chief difficulty in adjusting the claims to liberality in controversial points, arises from the pretensions that mere *indifference* often makes to it. But though it be admitted, that without somewhat of an impression of the uncertainty or comparative unimportance of the subjects about which disputants are so much divided, it is scarcely possible to regard them with a liberal spirit, yet this state of mind is not of itself liberality. It may, and often does, produce an arrogant and contemptuous mode of treating opponents not arrived at so happy a degree of laxity, which is as really contrary

to the spirit of liberality, as the opposite strictness can be.

It must, however, be confessed, that there is in the very nature of some tenets, something so essentially adverse to liberality, that they never can be imagined to subsist together. A man who is so unfortunate as to believe that all but those of his own way of thinking are doomed to eternal reprobation, can scarcely, whatever be the native temper of his mind, view with any thing like liberal allowance the opinions opposed to his own, or the attempts to propagate them. How can he give the hand of fraternity to one whom he supposes the inveterate foe of God and man? How can he raise himself above differences, which in his own estimation rise infinitely beyond every thing else?

Among the causes *we* have for thankfulness, it is not the least considerable, that we have been taught to regard the whole human race as one family, all capable of rendering themselves approved by their common Father, who, in allotting them different portions of light and knowledge, has certainly not expected from them an uniformity of belief and practice.

I conclude with a brief exemplification of the use of the terms in question.

When Jesus preached, *Prejudice* cried, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" "Crucify him, crucify him, exclaimed *Bigotry*. "Why, what evil hath he done?" remonstrated *Candour*. And *Liberality* drew from his words this inference, "In every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

Your truly affectionate, &c.

## LETTER XI.

## ON RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES.

DEAR SON,

WE have read together an *Essay on Sects and Establishments*, with an admiration in which we might suspect an allowable partiality, had not the unbiassed voice of the public given an equal attestation to its merit. The truly philosophical view it has taken of the subject, and the novel and acute observations with which it abounds, expressed with a characteristic force and brilliancy of language, have fairly entitled it to the rank of a masterpiece in its kind. The home truths it contains have not, I believe, been universally relished, but they have commanded the assent of impartial observers. Possibly, however, some of the ideas given in

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it concerning *Seets*, are rather historically than essentially true; and new states of opinion and manners may arise, in which different principles must be called in for the purpose of determining on their character and fate. Inasmuch as sects are the counterparts of establishments, the spirit of the one must depend upon that of the other; and it may happen, that without any manifest change in an establishment, its influence on men's minds may be so much altered, as materially to alter the nature of dissent from it. I will not say that this has actually taken place among us; yet in proportion as the full right in every individual to choose his mode of religion is commonly admitted, as penalties and disabilities are softened or abolished, and as men are accustomed to view with unconcern different systems of faith and worship, it is evident, that the circumstance of belonging to a sect or an establishment, will produce less effect upon manners and character. In this state of things, indeed, according to the doctrine of the Essay, the cause of Sects will infallibly decline; but I know not whether the spirit of forming *religious societies* will not, on

the contrary, gain ground. It appears to me that this is already the spirit of many separatists, who, while they have lost all attachment to sects, as consisting of united bodies known by particular designations, have by no means become indifferent in their choice of religious institutions.

By a *religious society*, in contradistinction to a *sect*, I understand simply this—that a number of persons of a similar way of thinking, for no other purpose than merely to enjoy to the greatest advantage their own tastes and opinions in religion, associate to form a congregation. It is perfectly immaterial to them (further than as they may wish the prevalence of what they most approve) whether or no there exist any other such society in the world. Religion is to them merely a personal affair, unconnected with other interests; and their only motive for associating in it at all, is that they find a duty or advantage in social worship, which compels them to adopt means for its performance. They have nothing to do either with attack or defence, unless the grand and universal principle of the right of private judgment

in matters of religion be called in question. In support of that, they make a common cause with all other separatists, and so far they act as *sectaries*; but otherwise, they have nothing more to discuss with the establishment, than with any detached society like themselves. As their purpose is simple, they find no reason to stand apart from the rest of the world in any thing else. Having, indeed, avowed a serious attachment to religion, by exerting an active choice in the mode, they are sensible that immoralities would appear peculiarly inconsistent in them, and that in things of a dubious nature, it is more becoming their characters to incline to strictness than laxity.

It will probably be objected to this idea of the formation of religious societies, that they would soon want zeal sufficient to keep them together. But, in the first place, what in this case is the *desideratum*? —not to increase the numbers of blind followers of a name or a doctrine, but to provide for the wants of those to whom social religion is really an object of selection. To such persons, differences not absolutely essential, will yet appear



of some importance; and as even in things indifferent, we conceive it an estimable privilege to exert a free choice, it would seem not likely that this liberty should be undervalued, in a matter at least connected with a thing of supreme consequence. Then, in fact, many of those doctrines upon which separate congregations are formed, are in a high degree important, relating to nothing less than the object of divine worship, and the conditions of acceptance in a future state. And while established churches, and even ancient sects, remain stationary, some of these doctrines are making an accelerated progress. While, therefore, religion continues to exert an influence over the mind, and the spirit of liberty retains its activity, it can scarcely be supposed, that a succession of voluntary societies will cease to be formed, adapted to the varying or progressive state of religious opinion, although they are unsupported by the peculiar manners or interests of a sect. Peculiarity of manners, though it undoubtedly tends to draw closer the bands of union in a society, yet offers an additional obstacle to those who may be inclined to enter it, and dis-

poses many the more readily to quit it. It has likewise the bad effect of diverting the attention from points of real importance, to trifles; and of narrowing the heart, by carrying into life distinctions only meant for the temple. It is always better to refer our actions to one great and decisive principle, than to many subordinate ones. The exercise of private judgment in matters of religion, may well stand upon its own single ground, without calling in the aid of petty concomitants.

The cause of separation has gained one considerable advantage in the present age, which is, that we scarcely hear any more of the *sin of schism*, with the apprehension of which timid consciences were formerly disturbed. Long ago, indeed, John Hales said, in his *Treat on Schism*, (never published, however, in his works, till 1721) “wheresoever false or suspected opinions are made a piece of the church-liturgy, he that separates is not the *schismatic*.” The impossibility of substantiating this charge against a party so as that it might not easily be retorted, and the futility of every scheme proposed for *comprehension*, as it was called, seem to have made the minds of

men easy in this particular. Still further, the supposed sin itself has, in the opinion of many, been expunged from the catalogue ; for experience has shewn, that the cause of religion, far from being weakened by these divisions and subdivisions of its professors, has acquired additional strength. The more it is made a man's personal choice, the greater interest he takes in it ; and as societies differ from each other rather about modes and articles, than about grounds and sanctions, the main authority of religion is not shaken by such differences. The ancient comparison of religious instruction to grain fructifying in the earth, will also apply in this respect, that, like the roots of corn, the spirit of religion becomes *more productive by division*.

You may think it an omission that I have said nothing of the *political* influence of sects, and of the loss that would sustain by breaking them into unconnected societies. I had not forgot this topic, but I well knew that the less is said concerning it, the better.

With respect to the person appointed by such a society to superintend the business of public worship, and perhaps of

private instruction, I do not perceive that he has any other general line of conduct to pursue than, by all proper means, to render himself as acceptable as possible to his congregation. Their style of manners, if of itself unobjectionable, must be his. They will naturally expect to find in him the affectionate and useful friend, the agreeable and instructive companion; but he will be under no necessity, in order to gain their favour, to employ arts or compliances derogatory from a manly character. His office and station have nothing in them which can inspire disrespect. If he is dependent, so are all who live by the public; but I scarcely ever knew an instance in which the advantages of education and office did not enable a person in that situation to assume a liberal independence of behaviour, within the limits of prudence and good temper. He need not renounce the world, though, like every man of wisdom and virtue, he renounces its follies and dissipations. He must, in order to be respectable, sustain his character with consistency and decorum, and it is a character which demands some peculiar sacrifices; but for those he

is amply indemnified, by the opportunity of rising above the common level, and taking his station with the graver and weightier part of society. He is not precluded from aiming at personal influence and respect from the community at large, by a dignified suavity of manners, and useful and ornamental accomplishments. Were not these objects within his reach, I should, as a father, be very unwilling that a son whom I esteem should engage in the profession.

Farewell!

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## LETTER XII.

## ON REPLY IN CONTROVERSY.

How far it is advisable to answer the charges of an antagonist in controversy, is a question you ask, with reference to the actual conduct of a distinguished person whom we both highly esteem. I shall begin my reply with a story out of the life of Melancthon by Camerarius. That great and amiable man was the subject of much virulent abuse, as might naturally be expected to fall upon one, who in the interesting business of reform, pursued a middle course, almost equally remote from the extremes on either part. When strongly urged by his most intimate friends to publish a vindication of his conduct, "I will answer you, (said he) as my little daughter did me. She had one day been sent on an errand, and staid much longer than she ought to have done. I



met her in the street, and said to her, Now, child! what will you say to your mother when she chides you for staying so long?—I will say *nothing*, replied the poor child."

What is the inference from this story? Is it that Melancthon had really nothing to reply to the charges brought against him? The probability is, that he was conscious of being able to say nothing which would produce any effect on minds predisposed against him; for the matter of accusation was that prudent conciliatory behaviour which he did in reality approve and practise, and which he neither could nor would disavow; and therefore a reply would have been of no avail. And this consideration, in my opinion, leads to the true rule of conduct in these cases.

A writer publishes his sentiments on a controverted point in politics or theology, and supports them by the best arguments in his power. A hot-headed champion rises on the opposite side, who in print styles his notions impious or seditious, his arguments trivial and absurd, insults his person, vilifies his sense and learning, and



imputes to him the worst motives. What matter is there in all this for an answer? The writer does not mean to disavow his opinions because an opponent thinks ill of them. His arguments are not refuted by the abuse of one who, perhaps, from incapacity or ignorance is utterly unable to comprehend them. Of his sense and learning he has constituted the public his judges by the act of publication, and to their judgment at large he appeals. His motives can only be known to his own heart; and asserting them to be good, will no more convince his enemies, than the contrary assertion has convinced his friends. If, therefore, he has obtained from nature or exercise a due command of temper, he will preserve a dignified silence, till an attack of some other kind summons him to the field. Now this other kind must be characterized by one of these two circumstances—the production of new and forcible arguments against him, or a misrepresentation in matter of fact of a nature materially to injure his character.

With respect to the first instance, a disputant who honestly argues for the sake of truth alone, will either freely retract what

he cannot maintain, or will study for new arguments to support what he still believes, notwithstanding the plausibility of the objections raised against his mode of proving it. But in each of these cases a *reply* is his duty; for silence can proceed only from dissingenuousness, or from indolence. The public whom he addressed have a right to all the satisfaction he can give them; and the cause at issue must not be left to float in indecision, if it be in his power to contribute further to its determination.

Falsehood or misrepresentation is a personal reason for a reply, and often a very cogent one. Though the laws assume in some points the guardianship of a person's reputation, yet the modes in which it may be assailed are so numerous and indefinite, that he must in great measure rely on his own protection;—and surely few things better deserve protecting. The sages in the healing art have laid it down as a maxim, “*Nullum capitis vulnus contemnendum.*” The sage in human life might with equal truth establish the position, That no attack on moral character is to be slighted. Though proceeding

from the most infamous and despicable of mankind, they are never without some power of hurting; and silence under them will pass, in the estimation of a great part of the world, for an acknowledgment of guilt. If, therefore, an unprincipled antagonist attempts to render a man odious, either by representing him as saying what he never has said, or by inventing personal slander and calumny against him, it will generally be as prudent as it is equitable, to cite him to the bar of the public, expose his dishonest arts and malignant intentions, and with strong hand drag him forth like Cacus from the midst of his fire and smoke, to light and punishment.

Nor does this advice concern the writer alone. Any man upon whose character an unjust attack is made, will do right to vindicate himself, provided the charge relate to a matter of fact which can be brought to a decisive issue. That abuse, indeed, which is levelled at individuals merely as belonging to a particular profession or party, and is only an inference from such a fact, merits little notice, however it may bear upon moral character.

Its effect depends upon a general opinion which an individual cannot alter. Large bodies of men thus censured, may think it worth their while by public declarations of their principles to give the lie to such charges; but for a single member to do so, is always either unnecessary or useless. He must in those points stand or fall with his party. But accusations which mark out the individual as such, are of a different nature. They tend as much to injure a person with his friends, as to encourage the malice of his enemies; and he must not expect to be supported against them upon public grounds. We live in an age, in which the virulence of party-contention, and the facility with which slanders are propagated, render it equally necessary to be circumspect in our actions, and spirited in self-defence. The public is indeed just and generous when convinced; but calumnies are readily adopted, and the refutation of them always costs some exertion. A man fails in the duty he owes to society, as well as to himself, who, through indolence or apathy, suffers malignity and falsehood to triumph in the accomplishment of their purpose.

They should be opposed boldly, speedily, and openly. Every step in the contest should be clear and decisive; and principals should always be aimed at, however hedged in by forms and consequence. Every man capable of doing a secret injustice is a coward. He will shuffle, equivocate, and shrink; but if held by the firm grasp of truth and courage, he cannot escape an ignominious exposure.

Farewell!

## LETTER XIII.

## ON CLASSIFICATION IN NATURAL HISTORY.

I AM very glad to find, my dear son, that you receive so much pleasure from the pursuit of Natural History. No pleasures are more pure, more unmixed, more easily procurable; and the study of nature is in many respects peculiarly suited to your profession and situation. You do right first to follow it in a practical way, making yourself acquainted with the appearances of objects, and ascertaining their names and places in a system. But it will be useful occasionally to interpose reflections on the study in general, and to take extended views of that *economy of nature* which is one of the noblest subjects of contemplation. In order to lead you into such a train of thought, I shall communicate to you some remarks on



the classification and arrangement of natural substances, which I wrote down at a time when these topics occupied a good deal of my attention.

When a person begins to examine the productions of nature around him, he will first be struck with a perception of their infinite number and boundless variety. The whole will seem to him a vast assemblage of objects, grouped into all possible kinds of discordant forms, and presenting on every side an inextricable wilderness of diversity. But on a more leisurely and attentive survey, he will presently descry in this mass of things, numerous resemblances and conformities between particular objects, which will dispose him, by a process to which he is scarcely conscious, to separate them into classes, and make a kind of arrangement of them in his mind. This first rude classification will be formed upon some of the most remarkable exterior qualities of the subjects; and will only mark out some of the greater divisions, still leaving undiscriminated the minuter differences which distinguish one kindred form of being from another. Thus, the three *kingdoms* (as they are



termed) of *nature*, will soon be separated; the *mineral* being characterized from its inert and unchanging quality; the *vegetable* from its growth and successive changes; the *animal* from the superadded faculty of voluntary motion. In each of these will presently be discerned subordinate divisions; as in the animal creation, the several classes of quadrupeds, birds, fishes, and insects; in quadrupeds, the distinctions of great, small, mild, ferocious, herbivorous, and carnivorous. But this mode of proceeding will for a long time furnish only such general ideas as fall very short of the purposes of methodical arrangement; and it will not happen till after accurate researches have been made into the more intimate structure of bodies, that marks are discovered sufficiently numerous and distinct to identify genus and species.

But there is another process of arrangement, equally natural, that comes at one step near to the individual. In the common course of life, every person becomes familiarly acquainted with certain forms of nature, so as to have the idea of them strongly impressed upon the senses. A

thing of this kind, therefore, serves him as a standard, to which he can refer a variety of other objects in the way of comparison, as being like it in some points, and unlike it in others. Thus, when a man habitually acquainted with dogs first sees a fox, he will conceive of it as a small dog, with a sharper nose and more bushy tail than ordinary; and by these marks he will describe it to another man, who, from his previous knowledge of the dog, will probably recognize the fox whenever he meets with it. In like manner, the tyger and leopard are said to be animals of the cat-kind, and thence a tolerable idea of their form and manners is obtained before seeing them. And combinations may be made of parts resembling those of objects already known, by which a new production may be characterized. Thus we say that a plant has the leaf of an oak, the flower of a rose, the fruit of a plumb, the scent of a jessamine, &c. The defects of this method are, that, in the first place, it does not extend far enough, the species with which persons are commonly acquainted being too few to serve as archetypes of any considerable portion of

the works of nature ; and secondly, that it is inaccurate, since degrees of resemblance admit of every possible gradation, and strike different observers differently. It is, however, on an union of the two principles of arrangement above mentioned, that all systems of classification have been founded.

But before we proceed further, it will be proper to take into consideration the uses and purposes of arrangement. These are principally two ; one, to aid the memory by laying up the stores of knowledge in a regular manner, and applying precise determinate names to every single object, so methodized, that they may be found when wanted ; the other, to afford a summary connected view of the natural resemblances and differences between objects in their most important qualities, exhibiting the relations between causes and effects, and those gradations of being which constitute the great chain or scale of existence. It is the latter only on which the philosophy of natural history depends. The former is a mere matter of nomenclature, necessary, indeed, but as a means, not an end.

The perfection of arrangement is when these two purposes are united; that is, when the most important circumstances in the structure or economy of natural productions, are selected as the characters on which their divisions and subdivisions are founded; and this constitutes what is called a *natural method*. When this is rendered complete, we can, not only, on examining the real subject, readily determine its place in the system, and consequently its name; but *e converso*, on being told the name and systematic place of the subject, we can infer the most essential circumstances of its nature and history. To give an instance of this from Mr. Pennant's *Synopsis of Birds*:—If I find an unknown bird, with webbed feet, a flat bill, and a broad fringed tongue, I trace it at once by these marks to the genus *Duck* in his system, and by carefully examining the descriptions of the several species in this genus, I can discover its name, and learn all that naturalists have said about it. On the other hand, if I am told that a bird so named is of the *Duck* genus, I am sure, first, that it is a water-fowl; next, from its webbed feet, that it is a swimmer; and

then, from the form of its bill and tongue, that it lives either upon soft vegetables, or upon such animal food as it can scoop up, and separate at leisure, but not upon living active prey. Here I have a delightful perception of that adaptation of means to ends which affords so convincing a proof of the agency of a designing cause in the wonderful plan of creation; and I also discern one link of that vast chain which binds together the whole economy of nature.

But it is not in every part of creation that this perfection of arrangement can be obtained. The species in some classes are so extremely numerous, their general properties are so uniform, and their peculiar ones so various and minute, that we cannot find characters in them sufficient to establish discriminations at the same time precise and important. This is particularly the case with the vegetable kingdom; and the difficulty of the task has given rise to numerous attempts in their classification, upon different principles. What is absolutely necessary to the purposes of utility, is the establishment of divisions and subdivisions, distinguished by marks at the same

time stable, obvious, and numerous; otherwise the votary of this pleasing study may range over the world of vegetation, like Eneas in search of his golden branch, without being able, unless heaven-directed, to identify any one object of which he may have heard or read. This, however, can only be effected by an *artificial system*, that is, one, the distinctions of which are taken from circumstances selected for the purpose of arrangement only, and not on account of their relative importance. The thing wanted is a natural alphabet, composed of a number of letters, unmeaning, perhaps, of themselves, but capable, by a vast variety of combinations, of distinguishing with perfect precision all the tribes, families, and individuals of that immense nation from each other.

All modern botanists agree, that it is in the parts of fructification that distinctive marks for the purpose of arrangement are to be found in vegetables. The great number and variety of these afford, by means of combination, an almost inexhaustible fund of differences, accommodated to the several orders of division and subdivision on which accuracy of method



depends. It is upon these, you know, that Linnaeus has founded a system, which its merit has brought into general use ; and which would want little of absolute perfection, as an *artificial* one, if it were as uniform in its application, as it is regular in its principles. But it labours under a defect from which no artificial arrangement can free itself; which is, that it frequently thwarts that distribution into families, which nature has pointed out by resemblances so strong, as to render separation a violence scarcely tolerable ; so that either his principle must be sacrificed, or a very obvious deformity incurred by adhering to it. In these emergencies, the conduct of the author has not been uniform ; sometimes he has stood firm ; oftener he has yielded. In the latter case, species, in order to keep to their genera, are placed under classes and orders to which they do not belong ; so that if a learner unfortunately lights upon them before he has acquired a knowledge of the genus, he may hunt through the whole system before he can investigate them. It is as if, in a dictionary, a word beginning with the letter A should be



placed along with others of similar signification under D. The cause of this defect is, manifestly, that Nature has not attached so much importance to the circumstances on which his primary and secondary divisions are founded, as to make them uniform in productions formed in general after the same model. And, indeed, through the whole of the Linnaean classifications, in all the kingdoms of nature, there runs the same attention to minute circumstances in quest of distinctive marks, which throws an air of littleness over his systems, and gives them the praise rather of ingenious invention, than of coincidence with the sublime plans of creation. You will, I hope, know how to prize them for their utility in enabling you to acquire the knowledge of nature, without mistaking an acquaintance with them for that knowledge.

Farewell!

## L E T T E R XIV.

ON BUFFON'S NATURAL HISTORY.

DEAR SON,

IN my former letter on the subject of Natural History, I slightly characterised the great *Master of Arrangement*. At present I mean to communicate to you a few reflections on a writer who holds an equally high rank in a directly opposite mode of treating these subjects, the illustrious *Count de Buffon*.

The works of this naturalist and philosopher, unrivalled in descriptive eloquence, and filled with curious and exact details of matter of fact, exhibit also continual marks of that disposition to theorize which is almost inseparable from genius. Not satisfied with being the *secretary*, he assumes the office of *legislator* of nature; and fre-

quently quits the humbler task of painting things as they are, for the loftier purpose of speculating how they have been and may be. One leading principle runs through all his discussions of this kind ;—a disposition to reduce as much as possible the number of *species*, by supposing perpetual *varieties* generated by climate, domestication, and other incidental causes. He is ever in search of the *original stock* from whence a number of kindred species have proceeded, and largely indulges himself in suppositions respecting the means by which all the shades and ramifications of difference have been produced, often highly ingenious, but often, too, in my opinion, perfectly gratuitous and delusory.

This deduction of numerous present forms of nature from a few original archetypes, does not appear to me, even *a priori*, a very probable hypothesis. All the parts of nature have a mutual relation to, and dependence on, each other. If it be admitted that a large tract of country has long existed in the form of solid land, it must have been clothed with *vegetables* accommodated to each soil and situation. These must have afforded food and shelter

to the *insect* race, with which vegetables are every where found to swarm. Their multiplication to a noxious excess, must have been checked by the numerous *birds* which derive their chief subsistence from them. *Quadrupeds*, though less closely connected with the other classes of creation, yet must be supposed to have an appropriate place, and may reasonably be imagined to have existed wherever their existence was consonant to the general arrangement of things. We view, without surprise, in regions very distant from our own, all this general order of nature existing, yet made up of species so different from ours in the different classes, that we must necessarily refer them to a distinct origin. Is it a greater wonder that other species should be formed upon a model nearly resembling ours? After having gazed with admiration at the Paradise-birds in an Asiatic forest, or the Toucans in an American one, and recognised the creative power that originally placed them there, shall we perplex ourselves with endeavouring to account how the thrushes, pigeons, and finches, could get there, and by what means, with a general similitude to those

tribes as they exist with us, the variations which discriminate them should have been produced?

A decided purpose of what we call *Nature*, is to give birth to variety; and, according to a remark of Buffon himself, whatever can exist seems actually to exist. She sports a thousand ways in colour, shape, and proportion, keeping only within the bounds necessary to secure the great purposes of continuing and propagating existence. Why then should migration be called in to frame an imagined genealogy of kindred tribes, which in one country as well as in another, serve to fill up the great plan of being? In the vegetable kingdom, where, as migration cannot have taken place, except in cultivated plants, all variations in others must have been original, scarcely an instance can be found of perfectly similar species existing in the two great continents, even where the generical resemblances are most striking. But so prepossessed is Buffon against the notion of the original formation of nearly resembling species of animals in distant parts of the world, that where he cannot deny their present exist-

ence, and is unable to conceive a natural migration, he frequently invents the most unlikely supposition of their conveyance by men; and, on the other hand, he as frequently rejects, without reason or authority, the ocular testimony of travellers to their being found in parts of the world where he does not choose to admit them.

Of the means by which changes in original species may be supposed to be effected, the principal are *climate* and *domestication*. That both of these are capable of producing considerable effects, we can scarcely doubt; and carefully to enquire into these, and from a series of established facts to deduce a scientific theory of this important part of the animal economy, would be a most valuable addition to physiology. But to employ them in the explanation of perplexing facts, at random and without any proper clue of known causes and effects, is rather to propagate error than true science. Yet this M. de Buffon perpetually does, and more especially with regard to *domestication*. Whether by this vague term he understands such a perfect subjection and subserviency to man as we see in the horse, and the dog;



or such a lax connexion with him as subsists in the cat and the pigeon, there is scarcely a change in form and disposition which he does not ascribe to it, as hypothesis may require. It can ennoble or debase, enlarge or diminish, strengthen or enfeeble, just as suits the present occasion. It has given the camel his bunches and callosities, and has made the horse sleek and fine-limbed. It has created all the varieties of shape, size, and instinct, in the family of dogs, from the lap-dog to the mastiff, from the greyhound to the spaniel. It operates even upon the free winged tribes; and contaminates by a touch those who only approach it at a distance. To deny the great effect of suiting and contrasting breeds, of feeding, housing, and exercising the animals which man selects for his particular use, would be to betray gross ignorance or prejudice. But, on the other hand, to extend the operation of known causes beyond all bounds of proof or analogy, and to apply *words* for the purpose of argument, where the *things* are totally dissimilar, is to level all distinction between imagination and reason.



If domestication be used as a general term to express every association between man and animals, it is obvious that to reason with any accuracy on its effects, it must be divided into different stages. The first is that in which they are merely fed unconfin'd; man repaying himself for this care by the opportunity of making prize of them more easily when he wants them. Wild rabbits and pheasants are in this degree of dependance on man. It is but a little step beyond this to provide them with a detached lodging, as pigeons in a dove-cote; or even to confine them within bounds, provided an ample range be allowed them, as deer in a park. In all these cases no other changes in them can be reasonably supposed, than some diminution of their natural sagacity and active powers, owing to the greater ease they find in subsisting, and perhaps, an improvement in size and bulk in the individuals from their being better fed. A farther stage is that of animals kept in the fold and the yard, whose whole subsistence and protection depend on man, and who live with him and with their fellow-sub-

jects in a state of society, but without constraint. This is the condition of domestic fowl, and swine. Among these, varieties of size and colour begin to shew themselves; which, however, are probably owing not simply to their domestication, but to the contrivance of men, in selecting peculiar individuals, or importing foreign varieties, for the purpose of propagating the breed; for without this care, an uniformity soon comes to prevail, with a set of qualities, derived rather from climate, than from other circumstances.

The most complete stage of domestication is that of dogs and of beasts of burthen. These are trained up to be the servants or companions of man; and their natural qualities are all directed to this purpose. They live a life of perpetual constraint. To instinct is substituted habit; to native wants and desires the will of a master. Their food, their lodging, their exercise, the propagation of their species, are all subject to artificial rules. By these, variations in size, shape, colour and faculties of all kinds, are carried to their utmost extent. But in order to keep up to any given standard, a continued attention and

superintendence is necessary ; for all these acquired variations are merely individual, or at least temporary, and the species has a perpetual tendency to relapse to its natural model. From this principle, which I believe is universal, it appears an error to assign a remote domestication of progenitors, as the cause of subsisting varieties in wild animals ; as it is likewise probably an error to impute any considerable alterations to the very imperfect domesticity in the stages first described.

No writer in Natural History dwells so much as Buffon on the manners, and what may be called the moral character of animals. These speculations are extremely curious and entertaining ; though you will readily conceive that in a writer of a warm imagination and lively feelings they will be very apt to become fanciful and delusory. Those of Buffon will probably often appear to you to deserve this character ; though on the other hand it must be acknowledged in their favour, that his personal observations have in many instances been conducted with the most patient and minute attentions ; and certainly

very few writers have possessed equal advantages with himself. He warns his readers against falling into the mistake of attributing to animals the passions and sentiments of men ; yet I cannot say, that he always avoids it himself. On the whole, Buffon is an author whom all may read with pleasure, but whom none but the informed and judicious can read with unmixed improvement.

Farewell !

## LETTER XV.

## ON ORNAMENTAL GARDENING.

DEAR SON,

IN one of my former letters I hinted a future application of the considerations on nature and art and the love of novelty, to another of the fine arts; and I mean now to perform my promise in some remarks on *Ornamental Gardening*.

There is nothing in which the English taste more triumphs, than in the change it has effected in the whole system of this art; a change which for more than half a century has been gradually taking place, and may now be said in this country to be complete. This consists in entirely banishing almost every thing which constituted the artifice and contrivance of ancient gardening, and in their stead substituting a plan of embellished nature, imitative of the

scenery of real landscape, and of which the fundamental law is to exclude every appearance of regularity. You have seen, I doubt not with pleasure and admiration, some of the finest creations of this kind. To you they had all the graces of novelty; and viewing them as a transient spectator, without the comparison of a different model in your mind, you have perhaps implicitly admitted the principles on which the new system has obtained so universal a preference to the old. Yet, on reflection, you will readily perceive the great share fashion must have had in such a general alteration of taste; and you may be inclined to examine the matter a little more closely, not for the purpose of knowing whether you ought to have been pleased with what you saw—for we *ought* always to be pleased when we innocently *can*—but whether something very different might not please as much, or more. Let us then enter upon a disquisition of this kind.

The essential idea of a *garden*, as it has existed in all ages and countries, is that of a place, where, by the aid of culture, vegetable productions may be reared, more



excellent in kind, and more pleasing in distribution, than the ordinary growth of nature. Even in the most genial climates, it was found that flowers and fruits might be much improved by care and selection; that a number of the finest plants, greatly beyond the natural variety of any district, might be accumulated in one spot, and cleared of all mixture with the noxious and unsightly; while by some artifice of arrangement, they might be presented with more advantage to the eye, and formed into pleasing spectacles of novelty. In hot countries, the delicious luxury of cooling shades and perpetual verdure might be enjoyed to far greater perfection in regular walks beneath trees selected for beauty and fragrance, and bordered by rills which the hand of art had directed, than in the wild forest, entangled with brakes, and rendered impassible by morasses. In cold and changeable climates, the shelter of walls and hedges was absolutely requisite for the preservation of delicate vegetables, and during a considerable part of the year was agreeable to the person who wished to survey their beauties.

No pleasure derived from art has been so universal as that taken in gardens. This, in the first place, was owing to the union of simple gratifications they afforded; not fewer than four of the senses, the taste, smell, sight, and feeling, being most agreeably affected by horticulture. And if the refinements of *ornamental gardening* have excluded the objects of the first of these, it has been only to enjoy the rest in a more exquisite degree. For a garden, therefore, to be fragrant, gay, and refreshing, is as essential, as for a house to afford shelter against the inclemency of the seasons. But the combination of different pleasing forms into groups and compositions of novelty and beauty, is what has given the art of gardening a place among the finer inventions of genius. And in judging of the different styles of ornamental gardening, we are to endeavour to discover the principles best adapted to produce happy effects of this kind.

Formerly, the pleasure garden was always considered as an *appendage* to the house; its plan and decorations were therefore a subordinate branch of *architec-*

*ture*. That it should have been so regarded, was very natural. To enjoy the pleasures of a garden to advantage, it was necessary that they should be near. Its fragrance was received into the apartments of the house; its walks invited even the indolent to saunter in the sun or repose under the shade; and its gay forms and colours feasted the eye with variety of beauty within the sphere of distinct vision. Its flights of steps, walls, porticoes, and terraces, gave the architect an opportunity of gradually letting down the massy height of his main edifice, and shading off stone into verdure. That something of this kind is wanted by the eye, will, I think, be acknowledged by every unprejudiced observer at the first view of a modern mansion, rising unsustained from the midst of a naked lawn. Thus *regularity* was a fundamental idea in planning a garden; and instead of any endeavour to make it resemble a natural scene, every contrivance was used to produce artificial effects with the materials of nature. I can scarcely admit, however, that the leading principle of the art was,

To form with verdure what the builder form'd  
With stone;

for although trees cut into shapes, and hedges fashioned like walls, have occasionally been introduced as objects of vulgar admiration, yet better taste has rather aimed at producing novelties more consonant to the essential character of garden scenery. Of some of these, nature herself may be said to have afforded the rude sketch. Thus, a woodbine running from tree to tree, and encircling the tops of bushes, formed a sort of flowering canopy, which agreeably sheltered the wanderer from sun and shower. Art caught the idea, and fashioned an *arbour* or *treillage*, the regular frame-work of which directed the rambling sprays to weave an impenetrable covering, at the same time commodious and free. Thus, the velvet carpeting of the turfy down, pleasing to the eye and soft to the feet, was transferred to the "dry smooth-shaven green." The advantageous elevation of the rising bank, was copied in a *terrace*. The shady walk between lofty trees in a natural wood, was improved into the straight clear *avenue*; and the casual arcades of intertwined thickets, suggested the close walk over-arched by bending hazels. Walks of

gravel or grafs, laid down by line and rule, interfecing flower-bed and shrubberies of regular and perhaps fanciful forms, not only corresponded with the general regularity of the outline by which the garden was bounded, but amused by perspective effects. Water spouted up in a jet d'eau was a novelty, and certainly a very elegant one. The bafon and long canal gave new ideas of liquid extension. Ornamental building, ftatues, urns, and vafes, intermixed with fcenes of verdure and folitude, pleafed by the contraft they afforded to fimilar works of art in the ftreets and fquares of a city. A beautiful plant fhooting from the midft of rich carving, over which it threw its eafy foliage, had furely as good a right to admiration, as the imitation of it in a Corinthian capital.

Thefe, and a variety of other inventions which compofed the enchanted gardens of France and Italy, produced in a high degree the general refult of furprife. The garden was as much a creation of art, as the palace to which it belonged; and in both, after the purpofes of utility were answered (by which, in the garden,

I mean the simple gratifications of the senses afforded by the cultivation of vegetables) the remainder was addressed to the *love of novelty*. And as it is the characteristic of nature in all her works, to shun regularity, so when art attempted to produce novelty, regularity of disposition was the first thing thought of. The same difference that exists between the rocky cave or woodland shed, and an edifice of stone or timber, was conceived to distinguish the flowery meadow or thicket, from the cultured garden. This idea was so obvious, that I think it wants no defence; but we are now to consider whether the late refinement of banishing all regularity, and employing art only to produce a copy of beautiful nature, be capable of yielding, on the whole, a greater degree of pleasure.

As an objection to the old style it has been made a kind of universal maxim, "That the appearance of art always disgusts;" but I do not discover upon what principle this is founded. The footsteps of art indicate invention, industry, order—they are the footsteps of *man*. In most works of the artist they *cannot* be con-



cealed ; and the very endeavour to conceal them is such an exertion of art as must discover itself. If, then, it is intended by the contrivances of modern gardening to delude the spectator with an idea that the scenes he beholds are really natural, it is certain that the attempt will not succeed. Nor, indeed, can the owner of the costly and laboured plan ever wish it to succeed. The pride of art and of opulence will not suffer this wish. Yet many of the rules of taste seem to have no other foundation than to foster such an illusion. When the *Poet of the English Garden* thinks it necessary to give a long receipt in verse how to make green paint, for the purpose of rendering invisible the rails which are to separate the pasture from the lawn, we may be permitted to regret that either the poet or the painter should employ their art on an object so trivial. I am sensible, indeed, that in this case pride finds a gratification from an artifice which is to deceive the spectator into the belief, that the extent of its possessions are only terminated by the distant horizon. This is with many the true interpretation of the pre-

cept, to "call in the country"—to make it pass for their own.

But we will quit the *deceptions* of modern gardening, and fairly compare it with the ancient, with respect to the beauties they are both capable of producing. The free graces of nature, it is said, and with justice, yield a perpetual fund of *variety*; while the regularity of art cannot avoid a constant tendency to a tiresome *uniformity*. Whatever, therefore, there be of *novelty* in the singular scenery of an artificial garden, it is soon exhausted; whereas the infinite diversity of a natural landscape presents an inexhaustible store of new forms. It is added, that the forms of nature are intrinsically more beautiful than those of art; that the flowing strokes of the former, compared with the straight lines and sharp angles of the latter, constitute the essential distinction between grace and stiffness. Even moral ideas are brought in to decide the preference; and a taste for nature is said to be equivalent to a love of liberty and truth; while the votaries of art are pronounced slaves to formality and constraint. As I think there

are few more impassioned admirers of nature in all her forms than myself, I will venture to refer to my own feelings on the occasion. These inform me, that the pleasures to be derived from the various scenery of a fine country, are, indeed, superior to any which art can bestow. Architecture, painting, gardening, all sink to toys before them. But the comparison is not between a landscape and a garden, but between one style of gardening and another; and conceiving myself to reside in the midst of natural beauties, which I may not at all times be able or disposed to enjoy, I consider what *supplemental* pleasures can best fill up the vacancy. In this view, a garden connected with the house, lying directly beneath the eye, presenting forms novel from their regularity, and rich in artificial ornament, offering choice of sun and shade, of warmth and coolness, as the season may require, and gradually subsiding into the uncultured wildness of nature—does in reality seem preferable to an *imitation* of those very scenes with which I suppose myself already satiated. This imitation, if it be in a large style, is in-

deed the thing itself. To roll a river through a new channel, to spread out a lake, raise mountains, scoop out vales, and plant forests, is to *create a country*—a noble effort, certainly, in those who have compass and fortune sufficient for the purpose, and who inhabit a district scantily provided with natural charms. But this, in my idea, is a flight beyond gardening; and if attempted in the limits of a few acres, produces only laboured littleness. The tumbling rills of the Leasowes were such miniature cascades, that they appeared more like stage scenery than objects of romantic nature. And the level *lawn* formed out of three or four pasture fields, and dotted with clumps of half a dozen dwarfish trees, while it is perfectly efficacious in communicating to a house the cold comfortless sensation of unsheltered nakedness, can excite no image of the grandeur of a wide-expanded plain.

I should perhaps venture to suggest an union of some kind between the two tastes, were I not deterred by the decisive sentence of the *Poet*, who pronounces them absolutely irreconcilable; and in

consequence, though with manifest reluctance, dooms to destruction the venerable avenue of oaks which may have heard the strains.

Of *Sidney's*, nay, perchance, of *Surry's* seed.  
Heav'ns! must they fall? They must, their doom  
is past.

And why?—Because nature abhors a straight line even more than she formerly did a vacuum. And this, too, is the dictate of the bard who has transplanted the unnatural Greek chorus into the English drama!

With some indignation, but more pleasure, I turn to another Poet, and eminently a poet of nature too, who has consecrated this noble production of united art and nature in verses which, I dare predict, will outlive the sentence of its destruction.

How airy and how light the graceful arch,  
Yet awful as the consecrated roof  
Re-echoing pious anthems! while beneath,  
The checquer'd earth seems restless as a flood  
Brush'd by the wind. So sportive is the light  
Shot thro' the boughs, it dances as they dance,

Shadow and sunshine intermingling quick,  
And dark'ning and enlightening, as the leaves  
Play wanton, every moment, every spot.

COWPER'S TASK.

I cannot conclude my long letter more  
happily; so

Adieu!



## LETTER XVI.

ON POPE'S ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

DEAR SON,

THOUGH it is for the most part a poor employment to endeavour to point out faults in a performance of reputation, and to diminish the admiration with which it has usually been regarded, yet as far as inculcating the true principles of literature is of any consequence, it is important occasionally to discuss the merits of those works on which the public taste is chiefly formed. And this is peculiarly just and proper with respect to such pieces as are themselves critical, and written with the professed intention of establishing rules for composing and judging. Among works of this kind, few are more distinguished than *Pope's Essay on Criticism*. If the circumstance of its being written in verse have, on the one hand, impaired its authority, on the other, it has served to make it more read, and to fix its maxims more thoroughly in the memory. In fact, few pieces are more

referred to in the way of quotation; and after the high praises it has received from such names as Warburton, Johnson, and Warton, its influence upon the opinions of writers and readers cannot be supposed inconsiderable. Such commendations, indeed, render it a hazardous task to call in question its merits. But my experience of men and books has not served to augment my confidence in great names; and if I can give good reasons for the objections I shall make, I fear not that you will regard my attempts as presumptuous.

Dr. Warburton, at the close of his commentary on this Essay, strongly calls it to the reader's recollection, that its author had not attained his twentieth year. 'This view of it as a juvenile performance is a very proper one. It may justly excite our admiration of the early display of poetical powers it exhibits, and should suggest every indulgence of candour to its defects; but it should make us hesitate in attributing to it that comprehension of view and accuracy of conception, which were by no means the most striking qualities of the author in the full maturity of his powers. It does not belong to my

purpose to point out the imperfections with which it abounds as a mere poetical composition. What I have to do with, are the false thoughts and vicious principles, which render it a very unsafe guide in matters of taste, notwithstanding the large admixture of maxims founded on good sense, and expressed with the utmost brilliancy of language.

With respect to the *method* of the piece, as far as it really possesses a method not forcibly held together by the commentator's chain, it may be affirmed, that the arrangement of matter is simple and natural, but not very closely adhered to. Many of the rules and remarks are brought in with little connexion with what preceded, and apparently might be transposed without injury. And after all Warburton has done for Pope, and his disciple for Horace, it is certain, that the reader of each poet will scarcely, without a previous clue, become sensible of more than a set of detached maxims, connected only by the general subject.

Pope begins with an assertion which, if true, would render his work of very con-

fin'd utility, namely, that critics, as well as poets, must be born such.

Both must alike from heav'n derive their light,  
These born to judge, as well as those to write.

And he further limits the profession of criticism, by requiring that both talents should be united in the same person.

Let such teach others, who themselves excel,  
And censure freely who have written well.

But surely both these are very false notions; for nothing seems to be more a matter of acquirement than the habit of judging accurately on works of art; and this habit appears from innumerable instances to be perfectly distinct from the faculty of practising the arts. Indeed they have much oftener existed separate than combined.

Thus in the soul while Memory prevails,  
The solid power of Understanding fails;  
Where beams of warm Imagination play,  
The Memory's soft figures melt away.

The beauty of imagery in these lines, should not make us blind to the want of justness in the thought. To represent strength of memory as incompatible with solidity of understanding, is so obviously contrary to fact, that I presume the author had in his eye only the case of extraordi-

nary memory for names, dates, and things which offer no ideas to the mind; which has, indeed, been often displayed in great perfection by mere idiots. For, it is difficult to conceive how the faculty of judgment, which consists in the comparison of different ideas, can at all be exercised without the power of storing up ideas in the mind, and calling them forth when required. From the second couplet, apparently meant to be the converse of the first, one would suppose that he considered the understanding and the imagination as the same faculty, else the counterpart is defective. Further, so far is it from being true, that imagination obliterates the figures of memory, that the circumstance which causes a thing to be remembered is principally its being associated with other ideas by the agency of the imagination. If the poet only meant, that those ideas about which imagination is occupied, are apt to exclude ideas of a different kind, the remark is true, but it should have been differently expressed.

One Science only will one Genius fit.

This maxim is as false as it is discouraging, and derogatory from the pow-

ers of the human mind. It is, perhaps, generally true, that the genius is exclusively fitted for attaining excellence in one of the great classes of mental acquisitions, as science, art, invention, &c. but he who can make himself master of one *science* properly so called, may commonly with equal application attain any other.

First follow Nature.

This trite rule can be of little use without being opened and exemplified. It is perfectly obvious, that in all the arts which are imitative or descriptive of nature, she must be the archetype; but the proper manner of studying nature, and transferring its images to each particular species of the works of art, variously combined, contrasted, and perhaps heightened and altered, is the great *desideratum* on which their true theory and practice is founded. We shall soon see, that Pope cuts short all discussions of this kind, by reducing his general precept to the single practical direction, Imitate the ancients.

When first young Maro, &c.

That Virgil, not only in his general plan, but in most of the subordinate parts,



was a close copyist of Homer, is undeniable, whatever be thought of the supposition that he set out with a design of drawing from the sources of nature, and was diverted from it by the discovery that "Nature and Homer were the same."

The modern idolatry of Shakespear has elevated *him* to the same degree of authority among us; and critics have not been wanting, who have confidently drawn from his characters the proofs and illustration of their theories on the human mind. But what can be more unworthy of the true critic and philosopher, than such an implicit reliance on any man, how exalted soever his genius, especially on those who lived in the infancy of their art? If an epic poem be a representation of nature in a course of heroic action, it must be susceptible of as much variety as Nature herself; and surely it is more desirable that a poet of original genius should give full scope to his inventive powers, under the restrictions of such laws only as are founded on nature, than that he should fetter himself with rules derived from the practice of a predecessor. When Pope

praises the ancient rules for composition on the ground that they were "discover'd not devis'd," and were only "Nature methodized," he gives a just notion of what they *ought* to be. But when he supposes Virgil to have been properly "checked in his bold design of drawing from Nature's fountains," and in consequence to have confined his work within rules as strict

As if the Stagyrite o'erlook'd each line,  
how can he avoid the force of his own ridicule, where a little further in this very piece, he laughs at Dennis for

Concluding all were desperate fots and fools  
Who durst depart from Aristotle's rules?

Such are the inconsistencies of a writer who sometimes utters notions derived from reading and education, sometimes the suggestions of native good sense!

Some precepts yet no beauties can declare,  
For there's a happiness as well as care.

If the meaning of the writer here is only, that rules will not stand instead of genius, and that a poet's greatest beauties are rather the result of a happy flow of fancy, than the careful pursuit of precepts, the truth of the remark is indisputable. But if, applying to the critic, he means to

tell him that certain poetical beauties are irreducible to rational principles, and only to be referred to *luck, chance, a brave disorder*, and such other unmeaning notions, we may assert that he was indeed young in the *philosophy of criticism*. He appears, however, to have been in the right train, when he says, that where the *lucky licence* answers its purpose,

—————that Licence is a rule;

but he confuses all again by the often-quoted maxim,

Great Wits may sometimes gloriously offend,  
And rise to faults true Critics dare not mend;

for he ought rather to have concluded, that such successful deviations from common practice are not faults; and that the true critic should enlarge his rules to the comprehension of these real, though unusual, excellencies. So much, indeed, does he perplex himself between veneration for ancient rules, and regard to the practice of eminent poets, that the whole passage is full of contradictions, which cost his commentator much fruitless pains to reconcile, and oblige him to take shelter in a comparison between the sublimi-

ties of poetry, and the mysteries of religion, "some of which are above reason, and some contrary to it."

Pope goes on to observe, that though the ancients may make thus free with their own rules, yet that modern writers should copy this indulgence with caution, and not without "their precedent to plead." On the contrary, a liberal mode of reasoning would allow more freedom to the moderns, who possess such stores of new ideas, to deviate from ancient rules, than to the ancients who made and acknowledged them.

Those oft are stratagems which errors seem,  
Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream.

Either Steele or Addison, in one of his periodical papers, humorously desires his reader, when he finds him dull, to suppose he has a design in it. This doctrine is here seriously inculcated with respect to *the ancients*; but its absurdity is so manifest, that we may regard it only as the lively folly of a young author who was fond of saying smart things, without being solicitous about their truth. A judicious poet may designedly *under-write* some parts of a long work, or, rather he will find it im-

possible to be every where equally brilliant, but he will never with design write what is childish and insipid, if he thinks it to be such.

Hail Bards triumphant, born in happier days!

This noble eulogy on the poets of antiquity is not to be admitted without many exceptions and limitations; especially if it is meant to extend to all that unequal and motley assemblage of writers known by the title of *the classics*. Of these, many are valued and read merely because they are ancients; and even the most excellent afford sufficient scope for manly criticism, which can never arrive at solidity of principles, if it is obliged to regard the negligence and defects of great writers with silent reverence.

True Wit is Nature to advantage dress'd,  
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd;  
Something, whose truth convinc'd at sight we find,  
That gives us back the image of our mind.

The poet, in censuring the narrow and partial tastes of some critics, begins with that for *conceit*, or a glitter of dazzling thoughts rising one after another without meaning and connexion. This is *false wit*; as a contrast to which, he gives a

definition of the *true*, in the preceding lines. But he has evidently, by this purpose of contrasting the two kinds, been led to a description which exhibits none of the peculiar features of wit, as other writers have represented it, or as he himself usually understands it. By this definition, any just moral sentiment, any exact picture of a natural object, if clothed in good expression, would be wit. Its test being an agreement with images previously existing in our own minds, no other quality is requisite to it but truth. Even uncommonness is not taken into the character; for we must *often* have thought it, and be able to recognize it *at sight*. Nor has he given any distinct idea of that *advantageous dress* which makes a natural thought witty. No dress can suit some thoughts so well as the most simple. Exalted sentiments of the heart, and sublime objects in nature, generally strike most when presented in language the least studied. Indeed, he uses, within a few lines, the very same metaphor of dress, in exposing the finical taste of those who value a work for the style rather than the sense; and the fact certainly is, that the most confessedly witty



writers have often been little solicitous as to the *manner* of expressing their notions.

Pope evidently entertains a different conception of wit from that of the definition above quoted, in the lines immediately following.

As shades more sweetly recommend the light,  
So modest plainness sets off sprightly wit.  
For works may have more wit than does them good,  
As bodies perish through excess of blood.

Now, "modest plainness" is no foil or contrast to wit as characterized in the definition, because it may be the most "advantageous dress" for a thought. Again, that wit which may superabound in a work, must be a different thing from "natural imagery joined to good expression," for in those, what danger can there be of excess? He was certainly now recurring in his mind to those brilliant flashes, which, though often introduced with false judgment, are not, however, false wit.

The two characters of *bad critic* and *bad poet* are grossly confounded in the passage relating to poetical numbers; for though it be true, that vulgar readers of poetry are chiefly attentive to the melody of the verse, yet it is not *they* who *admire*,

but the *paltry versifier* who *employs*, monotonous syllables, feeble expletives, and a dull routine of unvaried rhymes. Again, an ordinary ear is capable of perceiving the beauty arising from the sound being made an echo to the sense—indeed it is one of the most obvious beauties in poetry—but it is no easy task for the poet to succeed in his attempts to render it so, as Pope has sufficiently proved by the miserable failure of some of his examples in illustration of the precept.

The pow'r of music all our hearts allow,  
And what Timotheus was, is Dryden now.

Music properly so called, and the melody resulting from versification, are things radically different in their nature and principles, though perpetually confounded in the figurative language of poets and writers on polite literature. Nor, indeed, do we possess terms by which these two kinds of pleasing sound can well be separately described. The names and characters, however, of poet and musician, are sufficiently discriminated; and Pope has committed a gross error in confounding them in the present instance. There is no resemblance between the manner in which

Alexander was affected by the *music* of Timotheus, and that in which we are affected by the *poetry* of Dryden descriptive of that event. The first was, as story relates, an instance of the powers of pure sound, skilfully modulated and changed. The latter is a most animated picture of successive displays of passion; and much more resembles the effect of a history-painting, than of a piece of music. The mere versification is a very inferior point in Dryden's Ode, though it is a principal one in Pope's rival Ode on St. Cecilia's day. Alexander's Feast set to Handel's music may, indeed, be paralleled to the performance of the Grecian; but then Handel, and not Dryden, is the modern Timotheus. It is ludicrous enough, that Pope's comparison of Dryden to a harper, should come so near to the idea formed of Pope himself by a crowned head, who is reported, on hearing the poet greatly extolled in his presence, with a view of attracting his notice, to have asked, if Mr. Pope were a fiddler.

Fools admire, but men of sense approve.

This prudish sentence has probably made as many formal coxcombs in litera-

ture, as Lord Chesterfield's opinion on the vulgarity of laughter, has among men of high breeding. As a general maxim, it has no foundation whatever in truth. Proneness to admiration is a quality rather of temper than of understanding; and if it often attends light minds, it is also inseparable from that warmth of imagination which is requisite for the strong perception of what is excellent in art and nature. Innumerable instances might be produced of the rapturous admiration with which men of genius have been struck at the view of great performances. It is enough here to mention the poet's favourite critic, Longinus, who is far from being contented with cool approbation, but gives free scope to the most enraptured praise. Few things indicate a mind more unfavourably constituted for the fine arts, than a slowness in being moved to the admiration of excellence; and it is certainly better that this passion should at first be excited by objects rather inadequate, than that it should not be excited at all.

After properly exhorting his critic to candour and good-nature, the poet is, however, indulgent enough to point out

some topics on which he may be as four and severe as he pleases. The first fault given up to his rage is *Obscenity*; and doubtless, if the critic think it worth his while to direct his formidable artillery against such an obvious violation of propriety, no friend of virtue and decorum will restrain him. It was not, however, perfectly decent in Pope to express such a rigid zeal on this subject, when several of his own juvenile pieces, still preserved in all editions of his works, are by no means free from the blemish he stigmatizes.

The next devoted crime is *Impiety*. Now, a person may be very conversant with the rules of poetical criticism, without being able exactly to determine on the validity of a charge of impiety; and there is good reason to suspect that our young lawgiver was himself in this case. He says,

The following licence of a foreign reign  
Did all the dregs of bold Socinus drain;  
Then unbelieving Priests reform'd the nation,  
And taught more pleasant methods of salvation.

*Socinian* is a very potent term of abuse, and has, at various periods, been applied with singular advantage by those who

wished to render their antagonists odious ; yet the religion Socinus professed will bear comparison, in point of fervency and purity, with that of the most faintly names upon record. As to the “ more pleasant methods of salvation,” we are told by the right reverend annotator (a much better authority on this subject than the poet) that they were the duties of Christian morality, which succeeded the doctrines of grace and satisfaction held in the preceding age. Now, that these new divines offered salvation upon easier terms than their predecessors, by substituting practice to belief, and a man’s own efforts to vicarious satisfaction, is not a very obvious fact ; nor is it a necessary consequence of such tenets, that “ vice should find a flatterer in the pulpit.” “ Such Monsters,” whatever the poet might think, are not to be subdued by the thunders of belles-lettres critics, but by the adamantine weapons of sound argument.

Here I close my remarks on this performance. It would be no difficult task to adduce from it many more instances of shallow judgment on books and things, either incidentally mentioned, or design-



ed as exemplifications of his rules; but my purpose was to shew you how little it deserves the high estimation in which it has been held as a didactic work. This, I trust, has sufficiently appeared, from the vague and inconsequent manner of thinking on fundamental points, displayed in the cited passages. The character of a consummate critic at twenty is what Pope may well resign, and still retain enough of just reputation to place him in the most conspicuous rank of English literatue.

Farewell!

## LETTER XVII.

ON THE ANALOGY BETWEEN MENTAL AND  
BODILY DISEASE.

DEAR SON,

It has been asserted, that every man's way of thinking takes a tinge from his profession or manner of life. Of the truth of this remark I am personally sensible, from the habit I have formed of applying medical ideas to moral subjects. It is indeed, nothing new to regard all mental vices and defects as so many *diseases* of that part of our frame; and moralists of all ages have been fond of running comparisons between maladies of the body and the mind. Yet I cannot but think, that something still remains to be done in the practical application of the doctrine; and that it is of importance, both with respect to the successful treatment of mental diseases, and to the preservation of our tran-

quility under a view of the evils of life, that this resemblance should be strongly impressed on our thoughts.

One consequence would undoubtedly be the result ; that we should not expect to cure these disorders by trifling and casual remedies, but should fix our confidence solely on some vigorous plan, consisting in the resolute application of *opposites*, upon the medical maxim, *contraria contrariorum esse remedia*. It is the want of power or resolution to put in practice this grand principle of the healing art, that renders moral distempers in general so inveterate. What can be relied upon to oppose strong natural inclination, constant example, and confirmed habit, but some agent equally powerful, which shall, not in the way of persuasion, but by coercive force, be employed to draw over the mind to a contrary state of feeling? Where this can be put in practice, there is no case of moral depravity so desperate as to be without the hope, nay, perhaps, without the certainty, of a cure ; where it cannot, the slightest vitiation is hardly to be removed. It is not without experience that I speak in this matter. More than once has it

happened to me to be consulted as a friend on occasion of the discovery of very ruinous tendencies in young persons. In these instances, dissuading all petty expedients, I recommended such a total change of external circumstances, as would of *necessity* induce as complete a change of views and habits;—and the event justified my advice. That this was a right method, was, indeed, sufficiently obvious; but it might not be so obvious that it was the *only* right one; at least, parental indulgence is frequently glad to shelter itself under the plausibility of some less decisive mode of proceeding. But to one who has a just notion of the operation of *motives* upon the mind, it will be very apparent, that as long as those which are induced for the purpose of remedy continue inferior in force to those which nourish the disease, no benefit whatever can be expected from their application. Actions which we would avert will either be done, or not be done. They will infallibly be done, if the motives for them preponderate; they will not be done, if the contrary takes place. There is no medium: and such is the power of habit, that every

instance either of yielding or of resisting, favours a similar termination when the trial next occurs. Whence may be demonstratively shewn the weakness of expecting any advantage from the mere repetition of efforts that have already proved unavailing.

You are better acquainted than myself with the scholastic controversies concerning liberty and necessity. I frequently hear them called mere logomachies, and such I am inclined to suppose they are, when carried to their utmost degree of abstraction. But that they are not entirely without practical effects upon common minds, I am from observation convinced; and in particular, I have no doubt that the tendency of the popular notions concerning man's free-agency, is to inspire too much confidence in the efficacy of the feeblér aids to morality, such as precept and argumentation. By those who entertain exalted ideas of the self-determining power of the soul, it is readily conceived, that placing before it an irrefragable syllogism in favour of virtue can scarcely fail to enable it to resist all the allurements of vice.

But the poet could long ago pronounce, "*Video meliora, proboque, deteriora, sequor*;" the true interpretation of which is, that conviction of the understanding is not the strongest motive that can be presented to the human mind.

A person cannot have surveyed mankind with an attentive eye, without perceiving in many cases such an irresistible series of causes operating in the formation of character, as must convince him of the actual existence of a moral necessity;—that is, of such an overbearing prepollency of motives tending to one point, that in no one instant of a man's life could he be supposed capable of a course of action different from that he has really adopted. Pursue an individual belonging to any one of the strongly-marked classes in society from the cradle to the grave, and see if the process of fixing his character have not been as regular and unalterable as that of his bodily constitution. Take one of those, too frequent in this great metropolis, who may be said to be suckled with vice and infamy, the breed of a prostitute and house-breaker, born and educated in the precinct of St. Giles's. With the



first use of language he learns blasphemy and obscenity; his little hands are practised in picking pockets, and his infant understanding in framing tricks and falsehoods. His early pleasures are dram-drinking and debauchery of every species; and when not roused by appetite or compulsion, he passes away the time in the stupidity of sloth. He sees nothing before him but acts of rapine, cruelty, and brutality. Chastisements teach him craft, and inflame his passion for mischief. Not only the duties of religion and the obligations of virtue are things utterly beyond his comprehension, but he is a perfect stranger to all the comforts of decent life. Thus by the all powerful force of education and habit he is formed into the character of a ferocious beast; certain to end his life by violence, if it be not sooner cut off by the consequences of intemperance.

This, it will be said, is an extreme case; but even in the opposite rank of society, among those who, as we commonly say, may live as they like, instances may be found of equal subjugation to the law of necessity. Take the heir to a large eu-

tailed estate, brought up while a child in a house distinguished for riotous luxury and irregularity. Let him be nursed in ideas of self-consequence, flattered by obsequious servants, and indulged in every caprice of appetite and passion by weak or negligent parents. Transfer him to a public school, with a large allowance of pocket-money; and thence, when rising to manhood, to some *genteel* college in an university. Then send him on his travels, accompanied by an ignorant mercenary tutor. Let him make a due stay in every corrupt metropolis in Europe, the resort of his idle countrymen; and finish by *studying the town* in his own. Lastly, return him with a complete apparatus of guns, horses and hounds to his native woods, there to reside the uncontrouled lord of a herd of tenants and dependents, with no other object in life than to take his pleasure and maintain his hereditary sway. Is it in the nature of things possible that this man should turn out any thing else than a low-minded, brutal, tyrannical debauchee?

The physician knows that certain modes of living will infallibly bring on certain diseases, which will descend from parents

to children, and can never be extirpated as long as the original causes prevail. The moralist may equally foretell certain vices as the consequence of certain conditions and manners in society, which will prove unconquerable while circumstances remain the same. The morbid tendency in both cases is too strong to be counteracted by common remedies. Nothing but a total change of habit, effected by means equally powerful and long-continued with those which bred the malady, can work a cure. To establish such an *alternative* plan has been the aim of all the great reformers of mankind. It was that, you know, of our most revered friend, Mr. Howard, who, was fully sensible what a combination of corrective powers was necessary to produce any considerable and lasting effects upon persons long hardened by criminal courses. But such coercive methods can only, in the common state of things, be applied to those who have made themselves the objects of legal punishment. For the reformation of a whole people, and especially of the higher classes, nothing can be relied upon but one of those *grand remedial processes*, which are proba-

bly within the moral plan of Providence. Nations whom a long course of prosperity has rendered vain, arrogant, and luxurious, in whom increasing opulence has generated increased wants and desires, for the gratification of which all barriers of honour and justice are broken down, who are arrived at that state in which, according to the energetic expression of the Roman historian, they can neither bear their vices nor the remedies of them;—are only to be brought back to a right sense of things by some signal catastrophe, which shall change the whole form of their affairs, and oblige them to set out afresh, as it were, in the world. A conviction that such events are *necessary*, and that they are kindly intended as remedies of greater evils than they immediately occasion, is the only consideration that can tranquilise the heart of a benevolent man who lives in a period when these awful operations are in a peculiar manner carrying on\*. It may reconcile him to the various de-

\* Solet fieri. Hoc parum est: debuit fieri,  
Decernuntur ista, non accidunt.

lays and fluctuations in the progress towards a final event which he cannot but ardently desire. It may convince him that *nothing is lost*; that no evils are without their correspondent benefits; and that when he wishes for a speedy settlement of things by the quiet operation of reason, without any of the harsh methods by which stubborn vices are to be forcibly eradicated, he wishes for an impracticability as great, as the surgeon who would hope to cure an inveterate cancer without the knife or the caustic.

These are times, my Son, in which reflections of this kind are particularly seasonable. You are capable of giving them their due force; and even should you find yourself totally mistaken in your expectations as to the result of supposed remedial processes, you are provided with principles which will enable you to acquiesce in the humble confidence that, however distant, the time will come, when all evils both natural and moral shall receive their final cure.

## LETTER XVIII.

## ON SPLEEN AND LOW SPIRITS.

Do not be alarmed, my dear Son, at the subject of my present letter. It is not because I have observed in you any indications of a tendency to *low spirits* that I make them my topic, but because I know them to be the malady that most easily besets persons of a literary turn and sedentary profession. And however youth and variety of pursuit may at present secure you against their attacks, the time will probably come, when it will require some effort on your part to resist an enemy, whose assaults become continually more and more pertinacious, with less and less power to repel them.

So general, indeed, is the evil of low spirits in certain conditions, that I consider it as the grand leveller of human life—the malignant spell that renders all the distinc-



tions of rank, knowledge and understanding, almost totally inefficacious in creating those differences of degree in happiness that should seem almost necessarily to result from them. It is that which makes the splendid palace and luxurious banquet of the nobleman less pleasant to him than his poor hut and coarse meal to the labourer;—which defeats the well imagined schemes of enjoyment from liberal curiosity and literary leisure;—which infuses listlessness and disgust amid the most studied refinement of public amusement;—which, in short, sooner or later, gives convincing proof of the vanity of expecting to live happily by living only to be entertained.

This malady, under the name of *Spleen*, has been the subject of a variety of publications, serious and humorous, moral and medical. Among the rest it has given title to one of the most original poems in our language, replete with wit, imagery, and observations of mankind in an uncommon degree. I need scarcely tell you that I mean, *Green's poem of the Spleen*. The author seems, like Horace,

to have roved through the regions of philosophical speculation without any decisive choice, till at length he settled in a refined and rational epicurism. His favourite maxim is, to let the world glide by, viewing its shifting scenes as objects of amusement, without being enough interested in any to feel acutely from disappointment. His is the philosophy of good-humoured speculative indolence; and if a man wants excuses for sitting still and avoiding every cause of trouble and vexation, he can nowhere furnish himself with happier quotations. Who has not heard of

Reforming schemes are none of mine,  
'To mend the world's a vast design,  
Like theirs, who strive in little boat  
To tug to them the ship afloat, &c.

The principle of this, that

Zeal when baffled turns to Spleen,

must be admitted to have some foundation in fact; and may justly be pleaded against the indulgence of eager wishes and extravagant expectations in public projects; yet I cannot but think, on the other hand, that to inculcate indifference to all those objects which are most capable of rousing the soul, and giving employment

to its noblest faculties, is not the best advice for keeping off that listless languor which is the parent of spleen. In short, though the perusal of Mr. Green's poem may prove an effectual remedy for an occasional fit of low spirits, yet I am of opinion, that the course of amusive speculation it so pleasingly suggests, with the vacation from all cares and duties, public and private, will not answer as the general regimen against this disease of the mind.

Were I to treat medically upon this subject, I should lay a very particular stress upon *temperance* as the grand prophylactic; and I should make the word import much more than its usual signification. A plentiful dinner every day on a variety of dishes, with a bottle of wine to wash it down, seems in the common opinion perfectly compatible with a plan of strict temperance; and if it be preceded by a regular morning's ride to get a hearty appetite for this dinner, every thing is thought to have been done that men could do for the preservation of health and spirits. Let gout and hypochondria come when they will, the mode of living is not

to be blamed,—the one is hereditary, the other constitutional. This doctrine may pass for orthodox in the medico-moral casuistry of a visitation or corporation-feast; but it is nevertheless indubitably true, that such a *good liver* has no more right to expect equal and unclouded spirits, than a minister of state has, an unspotted reputation and clear conscience. But I shall dwell no longer on this topic, and proceed to that part of the regimen which relates more immediately to the mind.

This rests upon a simple foundation; for were I asked, upon what circumstance the prevention of low spirits chiefly depended, I should borrow the ancient orator's mode of enforcing the leading principle of his art, and reply, *employment, employment, employment!* This is the grand panacea for the *taedium vitae*, and all the train of fancied evils, which prove so much more insupportable than real ones. It is a medicine that may be presented in a thousand forms, all equally efficacious. It may be compounded of all the different proportions of mental and bodily exertion; nay, it may be solely the one or the other, provided it be *employment*. For I

will not hesitate to assert, that to have the mind ardently engaged in a pursuit that totally excludes exercise of the body, is much more favourable to the spirits, than a languid mixture of both.

We are apt to pity a person occupied by humour or necessity in a task which we think dull and tiresome. Our compassion is here misplaced. No task heartily entered upon can be tiresome, and a *business* is always better than an *amusement*. I have no doubt that Dr. Johnson was much happier while compiling his dictionary, than in the luxurious indolence of Streatham. And what but a consciousness of the necessity of *employment* to his comfort could have induced him, in the last years of his melancholy life, to make serious proposals for a translation of Thuanus? A late translator of Homer, whose admirable original productions have led many to lament that he should have been so employed, has in truly pathetic language taken an affectionate leave of his long work, as the sweet solace of many and many an hour, which by its means was made to glide by uncounted. And, I fear, the innate melancholy of genius has



rendered him too good a judge of the value of such a relief. For answering this purpose, the species of employment must be one which does not strain the faculties to the highest pitch; for such an exertion can be supported, by common minds, at least, only during a short proportion of time. A steady equable occupation, requiring rather care and diligence, than flights of fancy or the powers of invention, is the proper *staple* (if I may so call it) of a well-employed life.

With respect to the numerous body of those who may be idle if they please, they will find considerable difficulty, as well in the choice of proper employment, as in the exertion of resolution enough for the vigorous performance of a spontaneous task. A majority of them will, therefore, be doomed to the intrusions of Spleen, at intervals when neither active pleasure nor business preserves the mind from its attacks. But this is no other than the necessary consequence of situations of life wholly artificial, and which make no part of the original plan of human nature. They who are ambitious of stations in which there are no duties to perform, no



incitements to exertion, must not expect to possess that constant cheerfulness, which is the solace of toil, and the reward of useful activity. Providence certainly never intended to make such a difference between creatures of its hand, as that some should live only to enjoy, while others lived only to be the ministers of their enjoyments. Though in an advanced stage of society many must be exempted from the sentence of eating their bread in the sweat of their brow, yet it is an immutable decree that the oil of gladness shall brighten the face of industry alone.

For myself and my children, there is no danger lest we should come to want motives for the regular employment of the faculties bestowed upon us. Let us not murmur at the kind operation of such a necessity. For how much virtue and happiness are not men indebted to that constitution of things, which imposes upon them an obligation to act and to refrain.

Farewell!

P. S. Since I wrote this letter, I have been perusing a Discourse in which the benefits resulting from employment are

considered with reference to the great system established by the Deity, whereby personal and general happiness are in so admirable a manner made to coincide. It is there particularly shewn, how occupation contributes to our happiness by inducing a temporary forgetfulness of *self*; nothing being so much the bane of enjoyment, as the reference of our actions to the *selfish* principle. This excellent piece, which I cannot too warmly recommend to your attention, is Dr. Priestley's *Sermon on the Duty of not living to ourselves*.

## L E T T E R   X I X .

## O N   C O N S O L A T I O N .

D E A R   S O N ,

Y O U R intended profession resembles mine in this respect, that it is a duty frequently belonging to each, to administer consolation under the severest distress human nature can feel,—that arising from the loss of friends by death. In mine, indeed, the office is rather spontaneous than professional; and the house of disease is generally quitted by the physician when it becomes the house of mourning. But where attachments of friendship have made us somewhat more to a family than mere feed attendants, (and no profession so much favours those attachments) we cannot hurry away from the scene of affliction.

Though our art has failed, our counsel and sympathy may be advantageously employed to alleviate human misery; and callous indeed must his heart be, who is capable of refusing his consolatory aid on the plea, It is not my business. In fact, few persons will be found better acquainted with practical consolation than the medical faculty; and if any experience I may have acquired in this matter can be of service to you, to whom it will be truly a professional concern, you will thank me for communicating it.

With respect to the consolatory views that religion affords, highly as I think of their efficacy, particularly of that derived from the habit of submitting to the dispensations of Providence in full confidence of their kind purpose, I shall not at present touch upon them. It is unnecessary for *me* to suggest such considerations to *you*. I shall confine myself strictly to topics which refer to this world, and to our own powers in subduing the impressions of grief. But as we cannot expect to be successful in removing effects, without a thorough knowledge of their cause, it will be necessary to begin with considering what

is the real cause of the sorrow we feel from the loss of friends.

I am very far from agreeing with those who refer all our sympathetic emotions to *self*. I am *sure* that the feelings with which we behold the sufferings of a fellow creature are generally void of the remotest reference to our own condition. While, then, a dear friend is lying before us in the agonies of a severe disease, our sympathy is pure; it is directed to him, without any mixture of selfish considerations. But when the struggle is closed by death, the case is entirely changed. If his life was of little consequence to our happiness, the mind instantly feels relieved of her burthen; and the tender regret which remains, is rather a soothing than a distressful sensation. It is thus we feel when the infirmities of a good old age are brought to their period, and when long and hopeless disease, which destroyed all the ends of living, receives its final cure. But when our dearest interests were at stake in the life of our friend, the instant of the total extinction of hope is that of the most exquisite pang of grief. The very rage and storm of sor-

row then rises; and the sense of *loss* rushes upon the mind in all the black colouring of despair. Here it is impossible not to recognize a *selfish* cause of grief. It may, indeed, be somewhat tinged with remaining pity for the sufferer; but the great object of pity is self; and the feeling of deprivation is in substance the same as that proceeding from the loss of any other worldly comfort. The real measure, then, of affliction on such occasions, is the degree in which the mourner's happiness was dependent on the life of the deceased; and if we were able exactly to estimate this for another person, we might certainly foretell the range of his present and future distress. Such an estimate, however, is difficult to make; for the sources of enjoyment, and consequently of regret, are so different to different persons, that what appears a fanciful and capricious cause of sorrow to one, shall affect another as something the most solid and durable. Yet, there must, on the whole, be a certain proportion between losses in the common mode of calculating them, and the pain they occasion; and though in the very first movements of grief this propor-



tion may not appear, we may safely reckon upon its final operation. A fond mother of a numerous family, whose infant at the breast is taken from her, may for a short period feel a sense of loss equal to that from losing her husband or eldest son; because the child was, for the time, the object of her most frequent attentions and caresses. But this state cannot be of long duration. Her happiness in its main points was no more dependent upon such an infant, than that of a child upon its favourite bird. He weeps bitterly when it is flown, but a new one to-morrow makes him forget it.

The extent of the loss being therefore the true measure of the grief resulting from it, the natural and simple consequence must be, that all effectual consolation must spring from the means offered to the mind for repairing the loss. As a merchant who has seen his richly-freighted vessel perish before his eyes, can receive no comfort equal to that of collecting some wrecks of his treasure driven to land; so the mourner deprived of the dearest object of his affections, to whom he looked for the chief solace and pleasure of his life, can only feel relief from the

contemplation of some remaining source of happiness, which may afford a substitution, resembling in kind, however inferior in degree. The proper office, then, of a friend who undertakes the arduous task of consolation, is to discover and present to the view of the sufferer every object from whence a reparation of the loss may be derived. I am aware, indeed, that in the first movements of generous sorrow there is a delicacy of sentiment which spurns the idea of compromising its feelings, and regards it as a sort of violation of the dead, to submit their value to any cool calculation of utility. It delights in exaggerating every circumstance which heightens the loss; and prides itself, as it were, in regarding it as irreparable. To this "infirmity of noble minds" all due indulgence should be shewn, but without losing sight of what, after all, is the true principle. The grief being fundamentally selfish, must receive its cure from considerations which apply to self; and these, however gradually and indirectly, must at length be brought forwards. It is a fortunate circumstance when the commanding language of duty can be made to co-

incide with the soothing suggestions of comfort; for no delicacy can be pleaded against an appeal to duty. The mourner dares not say or think, My grief for the deceased absolves me from all the claims of surviving objects whom nature has committed to my care.—But duty prompts active exertions, which are the surest preservatives against the most baneful effects of sorrow. Hence some of those cases which seem of all the most deplorable are found to be less injurious to the mind in their consequences, than others where the loss is in appearance lighter. It is seldom that the widowed mother of a large and unprovided family is absolutely overwhelmed by her calamity; whereas the wealthy parent deprived of a favourite child frequently sinks into the palsying despair of melancholy.

Let him, then, who aims at administering a consolation beyond the reach of customary forms, begin with putting himself as nearly as possible in the situation of the afflicted person, and searching out the points on which grief really bears, apply his attention to discover what will ease it there. The widower, sitting in gloomy

solitude, or looking wistfully on a group of children deprived of a mother's cares and tenderness, wants a companion for his lonely hours, and a helper in parental and domestic concerns. Let *him*, as far as he is able, become that companion; and let him employ his thoughts in finding out friends or relatives who may in some measure succeed to the maternal office, and regulate the disordered state of family affairs. For the desolate widow lost in the perplexities of business, and terrified with her forlorn unprotected condition, let him disentangle complicated accounts, obtain the best council in dubious proceedings, muster all the connexions of kindred and friendship, and interest them in her behalf, set before her consoling prospects of future expectations, and shew her that the world is not that wilderness of despair to her and her children which in the first paroxysms of grief she imagined it to be. Her loss is perhaps the greatest that a human being can sustain. Its substitutes therefore should be sought with the greatest diligence, and from the most various quarters.

To parents weeping over the untimely grave of a beloved child, the consoler should call to mind their remaining children, and setting them full in their view; he should say, Here are your comforts—here are your duties! These are enough to fill your hearts and occupy all your attentions. By due cultivation, you may obtain from them more than a compensation for what you have lost. The tree has, indeed, been mutilated, but it may be brought to yield as much fruit as if all its branches were entire. To those whose *only* hope is blasted—whose prospects of a rising generation to cheer and honour their declining years is for ever closed—let it be tenderly yet firmly urged, that they live in a world filled with relations of every kind between man and man—that the ties of friendship, neighbourhood, and country still subsist in their full force—that the duty of *not living to ourselves* is in all cases binding, and if faithfully performed, will not fail to repay itself by heartfelt pleasures. Ask them what they would have been had they never possessed a child. Would the world have been a blank to

them, containing nothing worthy of their care and attachment? Cruelly disappointed as they have been—ruined as are all their plans of remaining life, yet it is in their power to set out anew, and create to themselves those objects of interest which would naturally have engaged their attention had they been childless. Are their minds strong and their views elevated?—present to them some large object capable of employing all their exertions in the pursuit, and of satisfying their reason in the end. Under worse than the *death* of an only child, Howard took into his protection all the friendless of mankind, and was consoled. Are their minds weak and their tastes trivial?—their child was little more to them than a play-thing, and a thousand other play-things may supply its place.

Thus in all cases of loss, some substitution may be found, which, if it does not obliterate the calamity, yet lightens it. The stroke of misfortune never falls so heavy as was expected. It is alleviated by a variety of things which stood for nothing in the computation, but which kind nature, ever studious of our happi-



ness, seizes upon, and employs to subdue her bitterest foe, obdurate grief. If great sorrows overwhelm us, little joys unite to buoy us up again. This process may in general be relied on as of sure operation; and, in fact, renders the office of consoler only one of temporary necessity. But during the first access of grief, it is frequently one of high importance; and on its skilful execution much of future peace and comfort may depend. You remember the pretty metaphor of Shakespear;

Being that I flow in grief,  
The smallest twine may lead me.

The first impulse in such a state may be of great moment in the direction of after conduct. One requisite, however, for performing successfully the office of consolation, nature alone can bestow—a feeling and benevolent heart. In that, I fear not your deficiency. That it may enable you in this, as in all other duties of your station, to act to the full satisfaction of yourself and others, is the most cordial wish of

Your truly affectionate, &c,

## LETTER XX.

ON THE INEQUALITY OF CONDITIONS.

DEAR SON,

IN my perambulations of this immense metropolis, where human life appears under all its forms, and the excess of opulence is closely bordered on by the most squalid poverty, many are the reflections that occupy my mind, often to the temporary forgetfulness of my business and way. Of these, some of the most painful arise from the contemplation of the prodigious inequality among mankind, and the state of indigence and degradation to which so large a portion of them appear condemned. Between the inhabitant of the splendid square, and the tenant of the gloomy alley, the apparent difference is such, that if we take our ideas of the nature and destination of man from the one, they seem no more applicable to the other,

than if they were beings of different orders. One appears the spoilt child, the other, the abandoned outcast of this world. There is, indeed, a class between the two extremes on which the mind may dwell with more complacency; but if this be made a standard for the species, our perplexities are only increased by observing the double deviations from it. After thus brooding over a chaos of confused thought, I seem at length to discern the forms of things with more distinctness; and the satisfaction this affords me is such, as to make me desirous of communicating it to you.

The first point absolutely requisite to be settled in order to view the actual condition of mankind with proper feelings, is, how far it is a *necessary* one. Some benevolent philosophers, shocked and disgusted with the state of society as it appears in all large combinations of men, have taken refuge in the supposition that it is all artificial and unnatural. They have gone back to the savage condition, and associating their own refined ideas with the simplicity of that state, they have formed a picture of human life, possessing the

moral advantages of civilization, without its vices and inequalities. But as long as this is no more than a scene of fiction, though drawn by the most masterly hand, it deserves no regard in the decision of a question within the reach of real observation.

In order to form true notions of what man essentially is by his nature, the only sure way of proceeding is the same that we should adopt in studying the nature of any other animal. Consult his history for a long series of ages. See what his leading character has ever been, and conclude with confidence that such it will ever be. If the operation of his faculties and propensities have at all times tended to certain effects, there is the same reason to suppose that they will ever continue to do so, as that any other of what we call the laws of nature will remain inviolate. Bees will ever construct combs; beavers will raise dams; rocks will form settlements; and men will build cities. The principle of congregating is so strong within him, that it will ever determine the condition of the bulk of the species. For, consider what effects necessarily flow from it. Men

assembled in societies mutually sharpen each others faculties, and open new sources of enjoyment, and consequently, of desire. To the arts of first necessity, succeed those of convenience, of elegance, of splendour. Arts suppose artists; both the contriving head, and the labouring hand. The first, being a rarer quality, will be more valued than the second. In the same manner, all the other more uncommon and valuable qualities both of mind and body will raise their possessors above the ordinary level, and secure them particular advantages. Thus, property will be acquired, will produce laws and government for its security, will accumulate, will be allied to magistracy, and in consequence will enforce and augment the natural inequalities among men. All these things are in the inseparable relation of cause and effect to each other; and to expect the first without the second, or to sit down in fruitless lamentation that we cannot have all we wish, without somewhat that we dislike, is childish and unreasonable.

Men, therefore, by the constitution of their nature, will ever tend to unite in

large masses; and these masses will fall into the grand divisions of rich and poor, high and low, governors and governed. This is absolutely unavoidable, for even abolishing at once all the arts and conveniences of civilized life would not restore men to equality. Distinctions of power and influence subsist in the savage horde as well as in the luxurious city. But taking society with this necessary condition, there is still ample room for the operation of human wisdom in increasing its advantages and diminishing its evils. These remedial attempts are part of man's nature likewise; and they are carried into effect by the employment of the very same faculties which, directed another way, have occasioned the inconvenience. If these are negligently or unfaithfully used, the condition of society becomes much worse than it might have been. Thus, if instead of counteracting by civil regulations the strong tendency to inequality, it be favoured and perpetuated by them, every evil proceeding from this source will, of course, be aggravated. And, in fact, the greatest differences that we observe in the apparent happiness enjoyed by different



tions, principally arise from the tendency of their political institutions to augment or restrain the disparity of conditions. Every good government contains in it a *levelling principle*; for what is the purpose of equal laws, equal rights, equal opportunities of profiting by natural and acquired talents, but to annul artificial distinctions, and cause the race of life to be run fairly. In return for the protection afforded the rich, it loads them with heavier proportional burthens; and it provides some legitimate mode by which the will of the many shall make itself known and respected, in order to counteract the grasping projects of the few.

But, it may be said, what, after all, have these contrivances done?—Have they in any country, considerably advanced in arts and commerce, prevented those evils of great inequality which you began with lamenting? Much less, I acknowledge, has been effected than might have been hoped. But before we enquire further into the prospects of future improvement, let us reflect upon one thing that *has* been done for the melioration of human life in

its lowest form ; and this is, the *abolition of domestic slavery* throughout all the civilized countries of Europe. Recollect, that in all the ancient states, which boasted the most loudly of their freedom and *isonomy*, the menial servant, the artisan, the cultivator of the earth, was a *slave*, who held life and all its petty comforts at the arbitrary pleasure of a fellow-mortal, often brutal, violent, and needy. Image to yourself, streets resounding with the lash and the cries of the tortured—fields covered with herds of men in chains, and their drivers—dungeons and racks in every private house—age suffered to perish in filth and famine, and youth the prey of lust and cruelty. Is any thing on this side the Atlantic so bad as such a state ? And has not this blessed change been effected by amending the principles and informing the understanding of men ?

We may now, with hearts somewhat relieved, enter the close court and sunless alley,

Where the pale artist plies the sickly trade ;

where the mechanic, the day-labourer, and those employed in the numerous

vile, but necessary, offices in a great city, have their abode. The fallow dingy countenances, uncombed locks, and beggarly apparel of these people, disgust your senses, and their manners equally shock your moral feelings. You shrink back, and are almost ready to renounce the relationship of a common nature with such beings. The idea of their present and future existence makes you shudder, and all the splendours of opulence which shine at the expence of so much wretchedness, are dimmed in your eyes. But when you consider that these are the representatives of half a million of human beings in this metropolis—that such they ever have been, not only here, but in every other seat of arts and commerce—you will be almost compelled to conclude, that their case *cannot* be so bad as it seems. Far, far be it from me to insult poverty by declaiming on its advantages! We have had too much of that cant. It is impossible honestly to suppose that the persons I have been describing, enjoy an equal share of the comforts of this life, however philosophically we estimate those

comforts. But I can never bring myself to believe, that the *necessary* condition of a majority of the human race is a decidedly wretched one. With respect to those I am now considering, a great proportion of them certainly are not destitute of a variety of the things that make life desirable

Survey them more closely. They have a home, a family, kindred, neighbours, converse, rights, a certain liberty of action, and no inconsiderable share of sensual gratifications. The circumstances that disgust you in beholding them, do not disgust themselves—habit has rendered them callous to the evils of dirt and tatters. When I acknowledge that it has also made them insensible to moral depravity, I perhaps confess no more than would be true of the modes of life in the highest ranks of society. Their vices are, indeed, gross and obvious; but you, I am sure, are not one of those who estimate the noxious qualities of a vice chiefly from its grossness. They have their virtues too, and of a kind as undisguised as their vices. They are ever ready to help one another in distress, and loudly unite in decrying

every thing unmanly, cruel, and villainous.

Still, their condition is attended with many serious evils, which, if they *can* be remedied, certainly ought to be; for to the happiness of so large a portion of society, every other consideration ought to give way. But in order to produce any favourable change, it is first requisite to distinguish the *necessary* circumstances of their situation, from the *casual*. The necessary, are those connected with that inferiority of station which, I have attempted to shew, *must* be the condition of a majority in all human societies, and more especially in those where the powers of the mind are most cultivated. I am of opinion, therefore, that it is not in the power of merely political institutions to do more for the advantage of the lower classes, than secure them from oppression, and prevent their interests from being sacrificed to the avarice and ambition of the higher. Whether this can be done much more effectually than is already done by the constitution of our own country, I shall not enquire; but I am ready to confess, that my expectations of benefit are not turned

towards changes in that quarter. It is on the removal of some of the *casual evils* attending the condition of the poor, that my hopes of seeing the world happier chiefly depend; among which I reckon gross ignorance, bad morals, and pernicious habits. That it is within the reach of human industry to produce great amendment in these particulars, and that, even in a metropolis so enormous and licentious as this, I no more doubt, than that all remaining slavery might be abolished, as the past has been. A comparison of different nations and societies, already affords full demonstration of the great differences in this respect that different care and management will create. The labouring classes of *all* towns are not left ignorant of every principle of religion and morality, and void of all encouragement to practise economy and the decencies of life. To the disgrace of this enlightened country, it has been one of the most remiss in attentions of this sort; but I trust a spirit is awakened which will suffer it to be so no longer. In promoting a reform of this kind, every man, however contracted his sphere of action, is able to advance the



public good ; but especially, those who have devoted themselves to the improvement of morals, possess both the ability and the influence requisite for the work. To you, who even during the course of your education exhibited an ardent zeal in this cause, I need not recommend it further, than by expressing my confidence that your attempts will not fail of success, if not so much as you would wish, perhaps more than you would expect. Evils, no doubt, moral and natural, will remain as long as the world remains ; but the certainty of the perpetual existence of vice, is no more an argument against attempting to correct it, than the same certainty with respect to disease, is a reason against exercising the art of medicine.

Adieu!

## L E T T E R    X X I.

ON THE PREVALENCE OF TRUTH.

DEAR SON,

“ TRUTH is mighty and will prevail,” is the axiom that for ages has administered consolation to those reasoners, whose efforts in a favourite cause have not been crowned with present success. That the foundation of this axiom is solid, I am by no means inclined to dispute; and far be it from me to attempt extinguishing that hope, which has prevented so many generous friends of mankind from sinking into despondency. Yet if its application have in any instances led to expectations which probably can never be realised, or if a confident reliance upon it have damped the ardour of due exertion, it may be useful to reduce it within the limits of strict reality. In fact, the assertion that “ truth must al-

ways finally prevail," appears to me much too general, and not to be acquiesced in without many distinctions and limitations. The grounds of some of these will be the subject of my present letter.

Of the obstacles to the prevalence of truth, there are some apparently so connected with the nature and condition of man, that a majority of the species must ever labour under their influence. Such are, especially, those proceeding from the operation of ungoverned passions and desires, during which the mind is never permitted to exercise that calm judgment which is absolutely necessary for the investigation of truth. Every subject which strongly excites the emotions of hope and fear, is liable to this cause of error. The medium through which it is viewed, is so ruffled, that it transmits all objects false and distorted. In cases like these, the *species* receives no improvement, and each *individual* has the whole process of melioration to go through for himself. He must by his own exertions acquire the due regulation of his heart, as much as the free use of his limbs, and the attainments of his

predecessors afford him no assistance. As a man born in the eighteenth century is no better able to endure cold, hunger, and fatigue, than one born in the first, so neither can he better resist the impressions of terror and desire.

Now, many of those subjects in which false opinions are most prevalent, lay such hold on the weak parts of man, his passions and affections, that he is in general incapacitated from making proper use of the experience of past ages, and seems doomed to run a perpetual round of the same follies and mistakes. This is the cause why reason has not been able to do more in abolishing superstition. Various species of it have occasionally been rendered unfashionable by ridicule or detection; but the principle itself still keeps its hold in the human breast, ready to seize every opportunity of regaining all the influence it may have lost. In countries the most enlightened by science and letters, it is wonderful how much superstition is constantly lurking among the vulgar of all ranks, nay, among the enlightened themselves: for where the temper disposes to it, both learning and science may be made

to afford additional materials for it to work upon. A faith in omens, prophecies, and horoscopes, in fortunate names and numbers, in warnings and apparitions, in supernatural cures, and other fraudulent pretensions respecting the principal objects of hope and fear, is no more likely at the present day to be eradicated, than it was at any former period. Reason has no greater power over these delusions, than the Roman senate had over the influence of the Chaldean soothsayers: *Genus hominum (says Tacitus) quod in civitate nostra et vetabitur semper, et retinebitur.*" It has rendered them in a certain degree discreditable, and reduced them to operate more in secret than formerly, and more individuals have been freed from their sway; but he must know little of the actual state of things, who supposes their present influence to be inconsiderable, or, perhaps, diminishing. It might, indeed, be imagined, that causes which had gradually been producing a certain effect, might confidently be expected to go on producing it in a greater and greater degree; but I fear this will not be found to

correspond with the real march of human affairs, which, in many cases, more resembles the motion of a pendulum, which, having swung to a certain height, thenceforth moves in a contrary direction. Thus it seems as if superstition, after having been weakened by the repeated attacks of wits and philosophers, was at present recovering its strength. It has obviously met with encouragement from persons of some note, who have probably seen a connexion between that state of mind which makes men submissive to superstitious belief, and the docility necessary for the reception of systems of faith which they were interested in supporting. Mysteries of all sorts are allied, and one formula of arguing serves equally in favour of all—"Because there are certain truths which you cannot help admitting, though apparently contradictory to reason and analogy, you have no right to object to those who offer you on the ground of such contradiction." Thus all *a priori* conclusions concerning truth and falsehood are intercepted, and mankind are left to contend in each individual case with the artifices of sophism and imposture.



I have often thought it a very hazardous mode of argument which the friends of religion, even the more rational, have been accustomed to use in their controversies with unbelievers. "If (say they) there be no providence, no future state, no obligation to divine worship, you must, however, acknowledge that no danger can ensue from acting as if there were. But if, on the contrary, these things are real, we hold that there is the greatest of all dangers in acting as if they were not." Consider what use may be made of this kind of reasoning by papists against protestants, and by the narrower sects of the latter against the more liberal. "You acknowledge that a man may be saved in our church if his intentions are upright, and his morals pure; but we deny that salvation is possible in yours on any conditions. Common prudence should therefore induce you to adopt that which both parties allow to be safe, rather than that which one alone, (perhaps the most numerous) thinks to be so." By thus introducing prudential considerations into questions of truth, sects, in order to gain proselytes, are encouraged to become as

dogmatical and uncharitable as possible, and to aim at frightening men into their narrow pale as the only place of refuge. This, in fact, is an advantage which bigotry has long possessed, and probably will ever possess, over moderation. Exclusive pretensions, whether respecting this world or another, will ever find powerful supports in the hopes and fears of mankind; and he who addresses both these passions will act with double the power of him who applies only to one.

For a similar reason, all those systems of faith which offer men eternal felicity upon easier terms than their own endeavours—that shift, as it were the load of responsibility from them, upon characters of mysterious dignity, who are to be repaid by the cheap services of unbounded homage and adoration—that inculcate fears which no conscious rectitude can calm, and nourish hopes that no self-examination can warrant, will scarcely fail of rendering themselves acceptable to the multitude, so long as they are supported by satisfactory authority. And how is this authority, once received, to be shaken? If it depend on *historical evidence*, can a whole

people be expected to enter into an examination of events believed at the time of their passing, and delivered down unquestioned through many generations of their ancestors? Is not this continuity of belief the best evidence they possess for the truth of all their national records? If it refer to *interpretation*, will not the same arguments which have determined the general sense of a writing in times past, continue to operate in any future attempts to interpret it? I suppose, in this case, the same fair intentions, and the same collateral aids, to exist in both periods.

But nations have, in fact, changed their systems. They have; but not, I conceive, from the unaided operation of reason and argument. In all remarkable changes of this kind, we shall discover, besides the more immediate interference of divine power, such a concurrence of circumstances, as was capable of a *coercive* action upon men's minds, and which cannot at pleasure be renewed by those who may wish to produce similar effects.

For the capability of receiving truth, there must always be certain preparations. I do not reckon freedom from error one

of these, for then truth would be absolutely unattainable ; no man being without false opinions, who had not already imbibed true ones. But I mean certain qualities moral and intellectual ; which bestow a fitness to be acted upon by argument. One of the most essential of these, is the fair honest desire of discovering the truth, and following whithersoever it may lead. But how large a portion of mankind is precluded from this state by previously determined interests and partialities ! How few, even among the pretended enquirers after truth, can say with the *ever-memorable* John Hales, “ For this, I have forefaken all hopes, all friends, all desires, which might bias me, and hinder me from driving right at what I aimed.” On the contrary, are we not very sure, that when persons of certain descriptions engage in what they call an investigation of truth, they have before hand decided what conclusions to establish, and without such a decision would never have undertaken the task ?

Further, how much diligence, how much study, what freedom from distractions, what renunciation of common plea-

tures and pursuits, are not necessary for the successful search after truth! It can be little less than the whole business of a man's life—"Vitam impendere vero." Ought we then to blame the ancient philosophers when they limited the power of acquiring intellectual truth to a few, and proposed it as the noble prize to be contended for by a number selected from the vulgar? Truth of no kind is of easy acquisition—that truth, I mean, which is the result of examination; for true opinion stumbled upon by chance, and only by following the authority of great names, is no certain possession, and will readily give place to error more highly patronized. Truth in science is only arrived at by laborious experiment and patient deduction. Historical truth requires for its investigation perfect impartiality, and an acquaintance with every possible inlet to fraud and mistake. Moral truth demands a heart capable of feeling it. Religious truth is not attained without an union of the requisites for all the other species of truth. Have we, then, any well-grounded reason to hope that the majority of mankind will

ever come to a general perception of what is so obscured by difficulties in the detail?

If you should think the doctrine of this letter somewhat inconsistent with my former one *On the pursuit of Improvement*, recollect, that the tenor of that was to shew the natural progress towards perfection in every practical art on which the human faculties are in earnest employed—and the advantage to be derived from that reference to general principles which is properly termed *philosophy*. To free men from those weaknesses of their nature which oppose the admission of abstract truth, is a very different attempt; which, however, is not to be given up in despair because it cannot be so successful as we should wish.

*Truth will prevail*—how far? As far as it is pursued with a proper temper, and by persons properly qualified. Place before such men an object of controversy capable of being decided, and be assured that it will finally be decided according to truth. But that false opinions on subjects which warmly interest the passions of mankind will ever cease to sway the multitude,



is what I dare not promise myself. A singular example of the different fitness of different men to receive truth is afforded by the modern imposture of *Animal Magnetism*. When its pretensions were submitted to a board of philosophers in France, its futility was clearly and unanimously established. Still, however, that class who are the proper subjects of deception were deluded by its bold promises, and mysterious reasonings; and among them the delusion in some measure still subsists. It cannot, however, stand long; but its votaries will remain just as prone as before to fall into another plausible delusion.

Meantime, such is the intrinsic value of truth, that no other encouragement is wanted to animate to the vigorous pursuit of it, than the distant hope of attaining it for ourselves, and propagating it among a select few; for in fact, of all the differences between mortals, the different degree in which they are possessors of truth is incomparably the greatest. Nor can it be doubted that a large share of it is within the reach of *man*, though not of *all men*.

Like the inoculation of the small pox, it confers indisputable benefits on those who receive it ; yet too few will probably ever receive it to produce striking effects upon the whole species. Let truth be fairly offered to the world without the veil of mystery, in her own naked radiance. If the world fail to recognize her, and leave her to a few enamoured votaries, let them console themselves with the assurance that Truth, like Virtue, is her own reward.

Farewell!

## LETTER XXII.

ON SECOND THOUGHTS AND MIDDLE COURSES.

DEAR SON,

“SECOND Thoughts are best,” says a frequently-quoted proverb. Considered as a prudential maxim, its truth, I believe, cannot be controverted; for there are few points of evil to be avoided or advantage to be gained, in which mature deliberation is not better than hasty decision. But that they are *best*, in the sense of being more conformable to moral or natural truth, in my opinion, is so far from reality, that I should more readily acquiesce in a proposition nearly the reverse—that *first* impressions are most to be relied on. This, however, I do not mean to assert without limitation.

Where a mind is well-prepared for the reception of truth, by rectitude of inten-

tion, and a habit of accurately conceiving what is presented to it, a question of moral conduct is almost always best decided by the feelings immediately consequent upon stating the case; and after-thoughts, in such instances, are usually the sophistry of self-interest or partiality. I ask myself, shall I make a solemn profession of what I do not believe. No! (cries indignantly First Feeling)—better to starve! Come (says Second Thought) let us consider the matter calmly; for there are many reasons why it would be *convenient* to make this profession. Examine its words—see if they will bear no other sense than the most obvious. At any rate, will not the end justify the means? It then begins its ingenious operations, and, in conclusion, the thing is done.

I have promised a man my support—shall I keep my word?—Certainly? Can you doubt it? Would you be a rascal?—But I wish I could disengage myself, for really I do not like the man. His politics or religion are different from what I took them to be; and I should do more good by discouraging him. Besides, every promise is by its very nature conditional,

and he has virtually broken his part of the conditions.—Indeed! then use your discretion.

In this manner it is that every triumph, in a heart not totally vitiated, is gained by cowardice, meanness and selfishness, over spirit, honour, and generosity. Conscience is never dilatory in her warnings. She pronounces clearly and instantly, and her first voice is the true oracle. By prolix and varied repetitions of the question, with foreign circumstances introduced for the purpose of perplexing, the response may at length be rendered almost anything we wish it, and conscience may be cheated into acquiescence in the most abominable conclusions. It is thus, that in our corporeal mechanism, a deleterious substance taken into the stomach, excites instant and violent efforts for its expulsion; but after a due repetition of doses, properly proportioned and combined, the stimulus ceases to be felt, and abhorrent nature becomes reconciled to the instrument of her destruction.

It was upon the system of *Second Thoughts* that the famous morality of the Jesuits was founded. They established it

as a rule, that in a case of conscience, if a *probable opinion*, or one supported by the authority of a single grave doctor, could be brought in favour of inclination, against an opinion confessedly more probable, it was sufficient to justify a determination conformable to it. And they took good care that their casuists should be furnished with probable opinions of all sorts for the use of those who put their consciences under the direction of the society. The following edifying story is related by one of their gravest fathers, from whom it is copied in the celebrated *Provincial Letters*. “A man who was carrying a large sum of money in order to make restitution by command of his confessor, called at a bookseller’s shop by the way, and asking if they had any thing new, was shewn a *new system of Moral Theology*. Turning over the leaves carelessly, he happened to light on his own case, and found that he was not obliged to restitution; so that having got rid of the burthen of his scruple, and retaining the burthen of his money, he returned home lighter than he went out.” Such lucky occasions of second thought, the pious author attributes



to the special interference of God's providence, by the ministry of a man's guardian angel.

The speediest decisions of *Reason*, as well as of *Conscience*, are frequently the soundest. Extravagant projects, absurd propositions, impudent pretensions, are rejected with scorn when first offered to the mind; and it is only in consequence of rehearings, at which fraud and sophistry are advocates, with wiles, like those of *Comus*, "baited with reasons not unplausible," that they at length work their way. Many high claims there are upon our acquiescence, which the soul of man would spurn with contempt and loathing, did it abide by its spontaneous decisions. It may be affirmed to have been the chief business of scholastic learning for many ages, to stifle this voice of unbiassed reason, and inure men to form determinations contrary to first convictions. How many mighty volumes could I point out to you, the whole purpose of which is to reconcile the mind to some manifest contradiction, or to disprove some self-evident truth! I remember to have read, that in the con-

condemnation of some Jansenist book, the heretical propositions were so injudiciously selected, that a great prince, into whose hands they were put, mistook them for articles of faith, and was edified by the perusal. Can it be doubted that here the text was nearer the truth than the comment, and that the prince judged better than the doctors? I have known instances, in which positions selected out of a political work for the purpose of obtaining its judicial condemnation, have affected impartial readers in a similar manner.

By these observations, however, I am far from wishing to inculcate a hasty decision on controverted points in general. Where the question relates to matter of fact, a very patient investigation is frequently necessary. Where it concerns a matter of expedience, it cannot be safely decided without minutely balancing its probable advantages and disadvantages, and consulting past experience in similar cases. But where it refers to principles, and must be tried by its conformity with certain notions, if not innate, at least early and very generally admitted into the

human breast, it is probably best judged of when presented naked to the mind, unmixed with extraneous considerations, and with no other preparation than to render it perfectly intelligible.

"The middle way is the safest," says another common proverb. If this was adopted from the "*medio tutissimus ibis*" of Ovid, it should have been remembered that his was a particular precept, not a general maxim. In reality, the middle course is very often the worst that can be followed in affairs of the world, combining the inconveniences, and missing the advantages of the two extremes. It is commonly the paltry expedient of weakness and indecision to get over present difficulties, by declining instead of confronting them—a compromise between right and wrong, between wisdom and folly, between enterprize and indolence, which generally meets with the fate of imbecility. In most emergencies, two directly opposite systems of action present themselves to our choice. Each has its appropriate character, its favourable and unfavourable circumstances. Each may suc-

ceed ; but only when followed fully and decidedly. Every leaning towards its opposite adds to its difficulties, and endangers its failure. This cannot be better illustrated than by military transactions. A General finds himself unexpectedly in face of a superior enemy. He has no choice but to fight or retire ; but the movements for each are incompatible ; one requires bold advance, the other silent retreat. One, however, appears to him too hazardous, and the other too disgraceful. He therefore takes a middle course, in consequence of which he fights to no purpose, and his retreat is intercepted.

One cannot be at all conversant with business, without seeing perpetual instances of the mischief done by this spirit of throwing in a little of this, and a little of that, in order to secure a medium. A person in a public assembly proposes a vigorous measure, and after some opposition, carries it. Some weak friend or designing foe, upon the plea of preventing extremes, then offers a few modifications and restrictions, of a nature directly subversive of the purpose intended to be answered by the first mover ; and these, for the sake

of accommodation, are assented to by the majority; thus the whole scheme is rendered ineffectual. In a similar spirit, arbitrators split a difference, and do justice to neither party—juries bring in verdicts which determine nothing, and leave the court to act as it pleases—consultations of learned physicians *neutralize* their plans so as to do neither good nor harm—and divines play off one virtue against another, till they make their hearers indifferent to both.

Truth may, perhaps, in general, lie somewhere within opposite extremes; but it is gross weakness to expect to find it by the mechanical operation of bisecting a line, or calculating an average. Even in cases where we are *sure* that the two extremes are erroneous, as in the representation of the same character by adverse parties, it is a futile method of judging of particular actions, to balance the contrary motives to which they have been attributed, and strike a medium. It is not in this manner that good and evil are compounded in mankind.

The controversialist who thinks, by

adopting somewhat from one system and somewhat from another, to fix himself on firm ground, and hold opposite parties in respect, will generally find that he has united both against him, and has weakened his defences on either part. I could adduce many instances to shew you, that in the contests of theological polemics, the middle way is as far, as it is in real warfare, from being the safest. The acute Chillingworth could not find a barrier against Popery, till he had established as a fundamental maxim, that *the Bible is the only ground of the religion of Protestants*. He perceived, that if church authority were admitted as *anything* in the controversy, the papist would be too hard for him.

Thus you see that proverbial sayings, the boasted wisdom of ages, are not to be trusted without examination. Aphorisms, in general, indeed, are but dangerous guides. The greater part of them have been formed not so much from the results of universal reason and experience, as from the authority of individuals in the infancy of both. A few examples went to establish a rule, and the exceptions stood for



nothing, till at length they have often been found more numerous than the exemplifications.

Farewell!

## LETTER XXIII.

ON THE PRINCIPAL FAULTS OF POETICAL  
TRANSLATION.

IN order to assist you in deciding for yourself the question you ask me respecting the comparative merits of Pope's and Cowper's translation of Homer, I shall lay before you some remarks on the chief purposes and principal faults of poetical translation, which suggested themselves to my mind in the course of my earlier reading.

As the great end of all poetry is *to please*, that of a poetical translation must in the first instance be the same. But besides this general purpose, it has the additional one of gratifying a laudable desire in the reader who does not understand the original, of gaining some idea how persons thought and wrote in an age or country often very distant from his own.

Hence arises a necessity of preserving, not only the subject matter and the poetical beauties of an original author, but as much as can be done of his peculiar turn of thinking and mode of expression. All the great *schools* of arts and letters are marked with a peculiar stamp of character, derived from the manners and circumstances of the time and country, which are an interesting subject of speculation. The translator, therefore, who fails to reflect an image of his original, with its characteristic distinctions, though he may present us with a figure graceful and pleasing in itself, has not performed his task completely.

One of the leading faults of poetical translation from the works of antiquity has been of this kind. Our manners and sentiments have become so very different from those of remote ages, that the two purposes of translating agreeably and faithfully, can with great difficulty be made to coincide. And as the first wish of every writer is to be read, he will naturally be led to prefer that mode of translating which will make his work the most generally acceptable. He will therefore rather

study to bring it down to the taste of his own times, than to carry his reader back to those which have been long forgotten. Nor can we blame him for such an accommodation to the feelings of his contemporaries as is necessary to secure his main end of pleasing. His fault is, that this design is usually carried much farther than is necessary, and so far as almost entirely to defeat the other purpose of translation.

In translating an author who lived in a rude and uncultivated period, two kinds of accommodation are necessary. The one consists in softening or suppressing such images and expressions as would give disgust to a modern reader; the other, in raising and adorning such parts as from their extreme simplicity would appear to him rude and insipid. Both these must be done to a certain degree; but both require much caution and judgment. The latter, in particular, is a hazardous attempt, demanding a most chastised and correct taste for its proper execution; and I am surprised at the unguarded latitude which so rational a critic as Dr. Johnson allows in this point. Speaking of Pope's *Iliad*, he

says, "Homer doubtless owes to his translator many *Ovidian* graces not exactly suitable to his character; *but to have added can be no great crime, if nothing be taken away.*" What! can there be a grosser violation of every principle of taste and good sense, than to make wanton additions to a writer's work in a style totally different from his own and that of the whole age in which he lived? What is this but introducing utter confusion of times and manners into the reader's ideas, and bringing all the striking variety of literary composition to one uniform measure of unmeaning refinement?

That this effect has been actually produced by Pope's spirit of translation, may easily be shewn in various parts of his works and those of his imitators, and especially in that partnership concern, his *Odysssey*. The original poem is, in my opinion, almost solely valuable from the curious pictures it displays of the state of society, both public and domestic, at the period to which it refers. It was therefore essential to preserve these in their genuine and characteristic colouring; and no graces of modern decoration could atone for the

want of this point of resemblance in the copy. Nothing is a more frequent topic in the notes of this translation, than the pleasure derived from scenes of simple nature; and many censures are passed upon the fastidious delicacy of French critics who are shocked with the plain unrefined manners of Homer's personages. But it is impossible to violate simplicity more outrageously than has been done by the English translator, especially of some of the books; and I am sorry that the book containing the adventure of Naufricæa, one of the most pleasing in the whole poem, is of the number thus travestied. It is among those ascribed to Broome, but Pope is answerable for the workmanship of his journeymen. Of this fault, I shall select a few striking examples, after premising a remark on one of its principal sources.

All the words appertaining to royalty, as *king*, *prince*, *court*, *palace*, &c. have so long conveyed to the minds of civilized people ideas of dignity and grandeur, that it is difficult even for a philosopher, to hear them with those impressions only which they excited in the early stages of



society. Yet without such a kind of abstraction, it is evident that the circumstances with which such terms are associated in relations of primitive life must frequently appear highly incongruous, and produce the effect of burlesque. The only means of avoiding this consequence in modern views of antiquity are, either to lower the ideas of royalty, or to exalt the dignity of the simple manners with which it was then accompanied. The former is the most effectual, and indeed the true method; for if we were taught to conceive of a king of Ithaca as of a chief in the Sandwich islands, or an Indian Sachem, we should not be surprised to find the Swineherd one of his principal officers and confidants. But what is then to become of the elevated character of the epopoea, and how are we to be interested in the fate of heroes of so low a class? Our translator has therefore taken the contrary method, and labours to throw an artificial veil of majesty over things in their own nature mean and trivial. Thus, when Emaeus is introduced making himself a pair of brogues out of a raw hide, we are told in the note, "that we must not judge

of the dignity of men from the employment they followed three thousand years past, by the notions we have of those employments at present ;” and this admonition is followed by some observations on the dignity of arts in their infancy, on the cookery of Achilles, and on the custom of the Turkish emperors to learn some mechanic trade. Now what is this but a laboured attempt to delude? The real dignity of any condition can only depend on the qualities requisite to fill it, or the habits of thinking and acting acquired in exercising its functions. A keeper of swine and maker of shoes must ever derive his manners and ideas from the sty or the workshop; and his relative consequence in any society only exhibits the relative advance of that society in power and civilization. Can any thing therefore be more absurd, than a remark of the same annotator, on the circumstance, that Melanthius the goatherd, bringing a supply of meat to the suitors, is made to sit at table with them? “ We may gather from hence the truth of an observation formerly made, that Melanthius, Eumaeus, &c. were *persons of distinction*, and their

offices *posts of honour*: we see Melanthius who had charge of the goats of Ulysses is a *companion for princes*." This same Melanthius, just before, on meeting with Eumaeus, is by Homer represented as insulting him in the grossest terms, and telling this *person of distinction* that he shall soon have to carry him out of the island and sell him for a slave. That such men were made companions by the suitors, is indeed a proof how little the suitors were elevated above them, but surely does not prove that the goatherd and swineherd were any thing more than goatherds and swineherds.

This incongruous alliance of modern ideas affixed to the terms of royalty, with the circumstances antiently annexed to the office, has contributed more than any thing to give a ludicrous air to many passages of Pope's *Odyssey*, and to mislead the English reader in his notions of the state of manners in that period. Thus, when Minerva in a dream tells Nausicaa to prepare for her nuptials, for that the best among the Phœacians, her kinsmen, have for some time been paying their court to her, the translator metamorphoses these

petty chieftains into so many potent kings.

Virgin, awake ! thy marriage hour is nigh,  
See from their thrones thy kindred monarchs sigh.

The preparation for this royal wedding was that the *princess* should spend a day in washing her foul clothes, and she is admonished by the Goddess to ask from her father a carriage drawn by mules, “for (says she with great simplicity) it will be handsomer for you to ride than to walk, as the washing pits are at a good distance from the town.” A searcher after real manners will be pleased with this stroke of nature in uncultivated life ; but he can only be disgusted by the translator’s burlesque attempt at disguising it.

In pomp ride forth, for pomp becomes the Great,  
And Majesty derives a grace from state.

Nausicaa and her maids mount this “royal car” or wain loaded with foul clothes ; and her careful mother puts good store of provision into a chest, and fills a goat-skin with wine. They likewise take a golden cruse full of oil, that they might anoint themselves after the work was over.

These simple circumstances are thus dressed out by the translator.

The Queen, assiduous, to her train assigns  
 The sumptuous viands and the flavoured wines.  
 The train prepare a cuse of curious mold,  
 A cuse of fragrance, form'd of burnish'd gold;  
 Odour divine! whose soft refreshing streams  
 Slick the smooth skin, and scent the snowy limbs.

In this style is the whole adventure related; and while actions and discourses denoting the very infancy of civilization pass in review before you, the language perpetually excites images derived from the courts of modern Europe. Where Nauficæ in Homer tells Ulysses that he will find her mother sitting on the hearth within the blaze of the fire, leaning against a pillar, the translator says for her,

Seek thou the Queen along the rooms of state;

and where the original goes on to say, that her maids, (using a word properly meaning female slaves) are sitting behind her, the politer copy gives her an attendance of ladies of honour;

Around a circle of bright damsels shines.

This is sufficient to exemplify that common fault of modern translation, disguising the original by a fictitious colouring. It is, I conceive, when carried to the degree of the examples above cited, a fault of the greatest magnitude, depriving the reader of the amusement and information he would receive from a true representation of ancient modes of thinking and speaking, and giving him nothing instead but an incongruous mixture of simplicity in action with refinement in language.

Another fault in translation, generally accompanying the former, though of somewhat different origin, is the spirit of exaggeration and hyperbole, which constantly endeavours to improve upon the original image or sentiment by pushing it to an extravagance beyond the bounds of truth and propriety. This is so frequent an error, that it would be easy to multiply examples of it from even our most celebrated writers. Dryden's translation of Virgil abounds with it. Thus, in the story of Cacus, when Hercules rolls down upon his cave the fragment of a rock, the Roman poet thinks it sufficient to say, "that the wide ether resounded, and the affright-



ed river rolled backwards." But Dryden makes the river fairly sink into the ground, and the sky equally terrified, run, no one can tell whither!

The sky shrunk upwards with unusual dread,  
And trembling Tiber div'd beneath his bed.

Thus too, where Virgil says no more than that Turnus lopt off a warrior's head at a blow, and left the trunk on the sand, Dryden adds,

———— the Latian fields are drunk  
With streams that issued from the bleeding trunk.

But the most ludicrous hyperbole of this kind that I have met with, is in Rowe's translation of the *Pharsalia*. Lucan, describing an army reduced to great straits for want of provision, represents the soldiers, after having eaten the fields quite bare, as plucking with their teeth the withered herbs from their ramparts. This is extravagant enough, according to his usual manner; but his translator far outdoes him:

Then rav'nous on their camp's defence they fall,  
And grind with greedy jaws the turfy wall,

It is considering this fault of translation in too favourable a light to charge it upon an exuberant warmth of imagination, beyond the controul of judgment. This might in some measure have been the case with a Dryden; but a writer of the coldest imagination may easily, from the stores of poetical phraseology, borrow flowers of hyperbole to interweave at random into the tissue of a gaudy translation, where he is at no expence for original ideas. This figure is indeed the most common with the most ordinary writers. Pope, as far as I have remarked, is extremely sparing in its use; while his coadjutors Broome and Fenton seem to think it the very characteristic of poetical language. A line of the latter in the fourth book of the *Odyssæy* will amuse you. It is part of the description of the palace of Menelaus.

Above, beneath, around the palace shines  
*The sunless treasure of exhausted mines.*

With respect to the prolixity, the unmeaning superfluities, and the constrained expressions, so commonly to be met with in translations, as they indicate mere want

of poetical talents, they are scarcely objects of criticism. They are evidently much increased by the use of rhyme, which aggravates all the difficulties of bringing the sense of the translation into a form and compass resembling that of the original. Yet as long as rhyme is more pleasing to the readers of English poetry in general than blank verse, I would not assert that translation ought to be deprived of its aid, more than original composition. It never should be forgotten, that the first purpose of writing is *to be read*; and that if this be not answered, a book may be an addition to the furniture of a library, without being any to the stock of literary amusement in a country. By this criterion, after all every performance must be tried; not, indeed, by merely counting the *number* of its readers, but by estimating the pleasure derived from it by those who from habit and education are best prepared for such enjoyments. Many of the poetical writings of antiquity are, I believe, incapable of pleasing in a translation, upon whatever plan it be conducted. When a man of true genius is led to engage in such a task,

we are bound rather to lament the waste of his powers, than to waste our own time in trying to relish the fruit of his injudicious labours.

Adieu!

## L E T T E R XXIV.

## ON RUINS.

I do not wonder, my dear Son, at the enthusiasm with which you relate your visit to the celebrated ruins of ———— Abbey. The natural charms of the scenery in the midst of which they are placed, their own intrinsic majesty and beauty, the rarity of such a spectacle, and the train of ideas associated with it, all contribute to render it one of the most interesting objects of a traveller's curiosity. I cannot but think, however, that the extraordinary passion for ruins of every kind which at present prevails, has in it a good deal of the rage of a predominant fashion, and goes beyond all bounds of sober judgment. And as in a former letter I ventured to appreciate another point of modern taste, with which this is considerably connected, the new style of gardening, I shall, in this,

canvass some of the principles on which our admiration of ruins is founded.

The first impression made by the view of a mass of ruins can scarcely in any country have been of the pleasing kind. It must have been that of waste, and desolation—of decayed art and lost utility. If the “smiling works of man” in their perfect state were always objects of delight, their forlorn and dilapidated condition must have excited melancholy emotions. Thus we find that the horrors of the howling wilderness were in the poetical representations of the earliest writers aggravated by the picture of ruined edifices; nor can we, I imagine discover in all antiquity, traces of any other ideas associated with these spectacles. But melancholy itself is a source of pleasure to a cultivated mind, and images of grandeur and sublimity rise to the fancy on contemplating the operation of some mighty cause, whose effects do not too nearly interest us. Hence the refined taste of modern times, occupied at leisure in extracting from every object the whole sum of sentiment it is capable of affording, has attached to ruins a set of ideas, formerly either



little attended to, or overwhelmed by acuter sensations. Nor have they been only regarded as *sentimental* objects. The newest and most fashionable mode of considering them, is with respect to the place they hold in the *picturesque*; and it is chiefly under this character that they have become such favourites with landscape painters and landscape writers.

The pleasing effect of ruins on the *eye*, may be merely the consequence of their having been parts of a grand or beautiful piece of architecture. The relics of Grecian temples, and theatres, or of Roman baths and palaces, the tall Corinthian pillars which supported some colossal portico, the long ranks of a broken colonade, the high-roofed cathedral aisle, and Gothic window with its rich compartments and delicate tracery, are all objects on which the noblest arts have bestowed intrinsic value. They are also *rarities*; and they form a striking contrast with the rustic and solitary scenes in which ruins are usually found. No wonder, then, that the barbarous hand is execrated which levels with the dust the fair remnants of a cultivated

age, nor that the eye of taste and knowledge lingers in silent admiration on these gems that glitter amid the desert. In this view, however, ruins have no peculiar value as such; on the contrary, the less *ruinous*, the better; and a remain of antiquity in perfect preservation is the great desideratum to the lover of the arts.

But ruins, still as *objects of sight*, are not without beauties peculiarly their own, which render them the favourite subjects of the pencil, and the admiration of all who travel in search of the *picturesque*. According to their feelings, the regular lines of art but ill harmonize with the free strokes of nature; and in a landscape they prefer the stick-built hovel and thatched cottage to the neat uniformity of an elegant mansion. But in ruins, even of the most regular edifices, the lines are so softened by decay or interrupted by demolition; the stiffness of design is so relieved by the accidental intrusion of springing shrubs and pendant weeds; that even the richest decorations of art seem not misplaced amid the wildness of uncultivated nature. This mixture, too, produces somewhat perfectly singular; and novelty in

itself is ever a source of pleasure. The ivy creeping along Gothic arches, and forming a verdant lattice across the dismantled casements, bushes starting through the chasms of the rifted tower, and wild flowers embracing its battlements; are the fantastic strokes of nature working upon patterns of art, which all the refinement of magnificence cannot imitate. It is, however, obvious, that for a ruin to be worth preserving as a figure in the landscape, it must have belonged to a work of some grandeur or elegance, and still exhibit the faded features of those qualities. A mere mass of rugged masonry, a cracked gable or tottering wall, can give no other impressions than those of decay and desolation. They may, indeed still be *picturesque* in the literal sense of the word; that is, they may with suitable accompaniments be happily introduced into a *pictured* landscape; but this is only a consequence of the imperfection of painting as an imitative art, whereby the harsh and prominent features of deformity are softened into ease and spirit. Who has not seen an old lime-kiln or dilapidated barn

wrought by the hand of a master into a striking piece of scenery? Yet, I presume, no person of elegant perceptions would choose to have such *real* objects confront his eye in the walks which he has led round his cultured domains.

With respect to the *sentimental* effects of ruins, they are all referable to that principle of association which connects animate with inanimate things, and past with present, by the relation of place. There cannot be finer topics for addresses to the imagination than this circumstance affords; and poetry and oratory are full of examples of its application. The view of a field of battle in which the fate of a mighty kingdom was decided; of gloomy towers once conscious to deeds of horror; of ruined palaces, the ancient abodes of splendour and festivity; of deserted towns where science and arts formerly flourished; of the roofless choir and mouldering cloister, once vocal to pious hymns, or sacred to contemplation; cannot but powerfully move every susceptible breast. The general sentiment inspired by such scenes is that of the mutability of human affairs; and in certain tempers of the soul, nothing

can be so sweetly soothing as the tender yet elevated melancholy excited by the contrast of the spectacle before our eyes, and that beheld by the imagination.

There is a mood,  
 (I sing not to the vacant and the young)  
 There is a kindly mood of melancholy,  
 That wings the soul, and points her to the skies;  
 When tribulation clothes the child of man,  
 When age descends with sorrow to the grave,  
 'Tis sweetly soothing sympathy to pain,  
 A gently wakening call to health and ease.  
 How musical! when all devouring Time,  
 Here sitting on his throne of ruins hoar,  
 While winds and tempests sweep his various lyre,  
 How sweet thy diapason, Melancholy!

DYER, *Ruins of Rome.*

But to enjoy this strain of meditation to advantage, it is necessary that the place or remain should refer to somewhat really interesting—that the relics should be sufficient to afford some aid to the fancy—and that the emotions inspired by the recollected scene be of a kind not incongruous with those we are likely to bring with us to the spot. I cannot but suspect, that the undistinguishing passion for ruins is only a proof how little their admirers are in general sentimentally affected by them. A gay party rambling through the

walks of a delightful pleasure-ground, would find an unpleasant damp striking upon their spirits on approaching an awful pile of religious ruins, did they really feel the force of its associations. Were they not capable of gazing at them as mere objects of curiosity, they would be sensible of a certain incongruity of place and occasion. Whilst, on the other hand, the genuine child of fancy, often too much disposed to a melancholy which our climate and habits of thinking naturally favour, might be led by such an adventitious aid to indulge his pensive humour to a hurtful excess.

Upon the principle of association it will, however, appear, that the greater part of the relics of antiquity in this country can produce but trifling effects on the heart. The ideas they suggest are those of forms of life offering nothing dignified or pleasing to the mind. The castellated mansion of the ancient Baron, of which nothing is left but a shattered tower, frowning over the fruitful vale, reminds us only of the stern tyranny, brutal ignorance and gross licentiousness, which stained the times of feudal anarchy. And if we look



back to the original state of our ordinary monastic remains, what shall we see, but a set of beings engaged in a dull round of indolent pleasures, and superstitious practices, alike debasing to the heart and understanding? We are rejoiced that their date is past; and we can have little inducement to recal them from that oblivion into which they are deservedly sunk, and which best accords with their primitive insignificance.

But there is a set of literati who will regard all that can be said about the picturesque and sentimental effects of ruins as mere trifling, and will direct your attention solely to their importance as *historical records*. This weighty topic I shall not attempt to discuss at any length. But I may venture to suggest, that much of their supposed value in this respect proceeds from the notion, that what would be of no sort of consequence if modern, acquires importance merely from its antiquity. In a narrative of the king of Prussia's campaigns, we are content with tracing all his considerable actions, and entering into his leading designs, without attempting to ascertain the precise spot of every encamp-

ment, or the scene of every skirmish. But if the antiquary, from the vestiges of a ditch and remains of a rampart, can render it probable that Agricola in his march against the Caledonians occupied such or such an eminence, he felicitates himself as the discoverer of a fact of high moment, and passes, among his brethren, as a most able and ingenious elucidator of the early history of Britain. Now, this is so harmless a piece of literary parade, that it may be spared a rigorous scrutiny. But, in return, the farmer should be allowed an equal attention to the improvement of his land, and not be treated as a barbarian if he indistinguishably levels both *vallum* and *fossa* with his plough.

Since the art of writing has subsisted, all the important transactions of civilized nations have been transmitted in the page of the historian, with a copiousness and accuracy so infinitely superior to what can be done by monumental remains, that the utmost we can expect to gain from the study of the latter with this view, is the obscure intimation of some fact, thrown aside, as it were, by the cotemporary chronicler, as not worth the pains of recording. Whe-

ther in the present state of knowledge it be an object of importance to collect scraps and rubbish which were rejected in their day even by monks and friars, I leave you to determine for yourself.

Farewell!

Kk

## LETTER XXV.

REMARKS ON AN ARGUMENT IN FAVOUR  
OF THE REALITY OF SPECTRAL APPEAR-  
ANCES.

DEAR SON,

IN a former letter I hinted to you, that superstitious belief was yet very far from being banished from this country; and that there was a disposition in some persons, far removed from the vulgar, to favour it. The late Dr. Johnson was of this number. A narrow education and native gloom of temper, might probably be the circumstances which originally enslaved his strong mind to the terrors of superstition! but I am convinced that he also supposed a connexion to exist between the belief of supernatural events in general, and those on which the evidence of revelation is

founded, and therefore was theoretically as well as practically credulous. This appears from the arguments he frequently employed in support of such pretended events; by which we know that he was able to make an impression on the minds of some of his submissive followers, whatever were their effects on his own. One of these, in favour of the reality of apparitions of the dead, which he seems to sanction by putting it in the mouth of the Sage in his *Rasselas*, has a popular plausibility well calculated to give it weight. As it is also of a general nature, and applicable to a variety of illusions which have imposed on the credulity of mankind, I think it worthy of a particular examination.

“ That the dead are seen no more, said  
“ *Imlac*, I will not undertake to maintain,  
“ against the concurrent and unvaried testimony of all ages and nations. There  
“ is no people, rude or learned, among  
“ whom apparitions of the dead are not  
“ related and believed. This opinion,  
“ which perhaps prevails as far as human  
“ nature is diffused, could become universal only by its truth: those that ne-

“ ver heard it of one another, would not  
“ have agreed in a tale which nothing but  
“ experience could make credible.”

Respecting this argument of the universality of an opinion, it may be said, that as there are many truths which it greatly helps to confirm, so, many errors have at all times taken shelter under it. The cause of this diversity it is of importance to examine.

That a great part of mankind agree in giving credit to a thing, even though it be somewhat which comes under their personal observation, will be a very slight argument of its truth, provided there be a manifest source of error in the case, which is of a nature to operate equally upon all. Thus, the once universal and still common notion, that the earth is stationary, while the sun and other luminaries move round it, is not in the least strengthened by the *numbers* who adopt it, since all have formed their belief upon the very same testimony, that of their senses, which is liable to the same error in all as in one. The same may be asserted of the supposition of a supernatural voice speaking in thunder; of lightning being the weapon of an angry



Deity ; of the place of future punishment being a dark cavern under ground ; and of various other opinions in which uniform associations of ideas have occasioned uniform deductions. To apply this principle in the present case. When mankind, from whatever causes, had admitted the belief of a state of existence continued beyond the present life, they must have endeavoured to form some conception of the *mode* of that existence. Now, as the *body* lay before their eyes, a lifeless mass, or was destroyed by fire, corruption, or other material agents, they must necessarily have had recourse to some substance of a rarer and subtler texture, which escaping from this gross and perishable part, might carry with it such impressed marks and qualities, as would preserve the stamp of personal identity. How metaphysical soever this process of thinking may appear, it must actually have been gone through by the rudest people, if they thought at all on the subject. Further ; that *form* and *figure* were capable of being impressed upon matter of much greater tenuity than their own bodies, they must experimentally have known, from the fa-

miliar instances of *shadows*, and the *reflexion* of their image from water or mirrors. In these cases they would plainly perceive, that a *something*, resembling themselves, might, in some measure, stand apart from their bodies.

Thus, I conceive, it almost necessarily happened, that all nations formed similar ideas of the corporeal attributes of those who had passed through death without total extinction of being. It was no longer gross body in which they were clad:—that, it was manifest, was left behind. But as, in thinking of the dead, it was impossible to abstract from them shape, lineaments, looks, and gestures, these properties were annexed to a thin, airy, or shadowy body, which, while it might be an object of *sight*, and perhaps to *hearing*, was none to the *touch*.

Ter conatus ibi collo dare brachia circum,  
Ter frustra comprehensa manus effugit imago,  
Par levibus ventis, volucrique simillima fomno.

ÆN. VI. 700.

Then thrice around his neck his arms he threw,  
And thrice the flitting shadow slip'd away,  
Like winds, or empty dreams that fly the day.

DRYDEN.

This uniformity of conception respecting men in another state of existence being established, it is, I imagine, an easy step to the supposition of their sensible appearance under such a form. Reveries and dreams of the fancy in persons of heated imaginations are so extremely like realities, that they are really taken for such. A mourning mother, filled with the vivid image of her lost child, might easily, in the dark and silent hours of night, when just sinking into disturbed slumber, imagine that the beloved form actually stood before her. The long revered face of an aged parent, might be fancied to clothe itself in a visible garb of light, in order to console, admonish, or inform the troubled and solitary child. Still more readily, the murderer, appalled by conscious guilt, and in continual dread of an avenger, might body forth the mangled corpse of the slain, to upbraid him with terrific looks and gestures for the bloody deed. All this appears to me so perfectly natural, and so correspondent to the universal history of the human mind, that I only wonder so few persons, among those who are thoroughly persuad-

ed of the reality of apparitions, can be met with, who pretend themselves to have been witnesses of them. And surely, the gradual diminution of these supposed events, now amounting in enlightened countries almost to a total cessation, is a much stronger argument against them, than the most general concurrence in their belief among ignorant and credulous people, can be in their favour.

In the deep windings of the grove, no more  
The hag obscene, and grisly phantom dwell;  
Nor in the fall of mountain stream, or roar  
Of winds, is heard the angry spirit's yell;  
No wizard mutters the tremendous spell,  
Nor sinks convulsive in prophetic swoon;  
Nor bids the noise of drums and trumpets swell,  
To ease of fancied pangs the labouring moon,  
Or chase the shade that blots the blazing orb of noon.

MINSTREL.

Of the various superstitions which the poet here represents as put to flight by Reason, some have been nearly as universal as the belief of apparitions of the dead; yet it will not, surely, be now asserted of them, that they have "become universal by their truth\*."

\* Cicero adduces this very same argument of the universality of belief as an indubitable proof of the veracity of the Delphic Oracle,—*De Divin. lib. 1.*

It may be further observed, that with regard to supposed spectral appearances, the idea of them has, in different countries and ages, received such variations, as might be expected from the operation of the fancy modified by variety of circumstances. One remarkable diversity is, that similar things are represented as passing in a vision and in reality; and sometimes it is not easy to say which of the two is intended. The famous descent of Eneas, after all the discussion of critics, remains liable to a doubt of this kind. It is, however, clearly in a vision that Eneas is alarmed by the shade of Hector announcing the irruption of the Greeks into Troy; and that he is admonished by the menacing form of his father Anchises to relinquish Dido. On the other hand, Dido herself, at the dead of night, but not in her sleep, hears voices calling upon her from her husband's tomb; and the real shade of Creusa, in a form larger than life, appears to console Eneas. Ovid, in his beautiful story of Ceyx and Alcyone, dresses up a visionary being in the form of the drowned husband to acquaint the sleep-

ing wife with his fate. She starts awake ; and, as the poet very naturally describes it, looks round for the image she had just seen before her.

—————et primo si fit circumspicit illic  
Qui modo visus erat.

MET. XI. 978.

This circumstance points out the origin of many of these delusions of the fancy. The mind strongly impressed with an image which has been haunting it during sleep, is scarcely able to dispel the phantom, whilst the violent emotion which rouses from sleep, still, in the midst of darkness and solitude, keeps possession of the feelings. The sensation on waking from a dream of this kind resembles the tingling of a bell after the stroke, or the flash in the closed eye which has been gazing at the sun. The impression for a time continues, but with less and less force in proportion to the distance from its original source. It would be easy to multiply instances in which the poets, those faithful recorders of popular superstitions, have thus wavered between vision and reality in their representations of the commerce with aerial beings.



Variations in the supposed form and manner under which the dead have appeared, and in the purpose of their apparition, will be found in all nations, corresponding to the manners, religious system, and natural scenery, of each country. Thus, some hear the shriek of ghosts in the howling storm, see them stalk gigantic in the grey mist upon the hill, and recognize their voices cheering the hounds through the dark forest, or over the wild heath. Others behold them clad in complete armour, mingling in the shock of battle, and announcing to the hero his approaching fate. Where the want of funereal rites was considered as the greatest of evils, the departed spirit was seen naked, shivering, and with piteous looks and accents earnestly requesting the boon of a little earth to cover its bodily remains. Later systems have presented cherubic forms of embodied light, haggard shades blackened with infernal fire, and dismal spectres entreating to be relieved from the torments of purgatory; and I have heard of a crew of English sailors, who were confident they saw their Wapping landlord pass by them on

Mount Vesuvius, and march into hell through a smoking crevice of the mountain.

I shall now leave it to yourself to determine, whether universal truth, or universal illusion, is most likely to assume such different garbs; and whether it becomes a man of sense and a philosopher, to reverse the case of the appellant from king Philip, and appeal from the world sober and enlightened, to the world ignorant and fanatical?

## L E T T E R XXVI.

## ON CHEAP PLEASURES.

DEAR SON,

You well know how much in vain philosophers of all ages have endeavoured to detach man from the love of pleasure, and to fix his attention on some sole and highest good, which might render all others foreign and superfluous. The voice of nature within him has proved too strong to be silenced by artificial precepts; and mankind have ever made it a great object of their lives to enjoy as much and as various pleasure as they have been capable of procuring. Taking the word in its large sense, and extending the plan of enjoyment far enough, both as to species and duration, I see no reason to find fault with the purpose; and I expect no benefit to arise from establishing one system of morals for the schools, and another for

real life. Supposing, then, the *end* of obtaining pleasure to be, within certain limits, an allowable one, the *means* are a fit subject on which those who are experienced in the world may communicate their observations to those who have its lessons yet to learn. It is an interesting topic, and its discussion is fairly within the compass of human reason and knowledge.

The advice of contracting our desires, so much insisted on by all the moral preceptors of antiquity, is a very important one towards the attainment of true felicity. It would, however, be a mistake to suppose that the suppression of desire, in itself, leads to happiness. There can be no enjoyments without desires; for in their gratification, all enjoyment, as well intellectual as sensual, consists. Those sects, therefore, which insisted on the entire abolition of desire, as necessary to happiness, were influenced by an artificial philosophy, which set out with misunderstanding man's real nature and destination. But, on the other hand, unsatisfied desires, or rather, such as we have no reasonable prospect of being able to satisfy, are the sources of the greatest calamities of life.

The true art of happiness, then, consists in proportioning desires to means, or, in other words, in acquiring a relish for *procurable pleasures*.

There is scarcely a station in life in which some attention to this point is not necessary ; for desire is as much disposed to exceed the range of present enjoyment in the highest as in the lowest. But it is more peculiarly necessary in those conditions, where an enlarged plan of education, and free intercourse with the superior ranks in society, have fostered lively ideas of gratifications which fortune commonly refuses the means of obtaining. What are termed the genteel professions are eminently of this kind ; and numbers belonging to them pay a severe tax for the privileges annexed to their situation, in the perpetual torment of unattainable wishes.

The profession you have chosen, my Son, in a peculiar manner forbids indulging those desires which are connected with the possession of opulence. To be made happy it is requisite that you should be made *cheaply* so ; and I please myself with thinking that many sources of enjoyment

will be fully accessible to you, which will scarcely leave you behind the most fortunate in the power of securing genuine pleasures. Taking for granted that you will seek, and will find, the highest of all gratifications in the performance of your professional duty, I shall now suggest to you some of those voluntary objects of pursuit, which may most happily employ your leisure.

At the head of all the pleasures which offer themselves to the man of liberal education, may confidently be placed that derived from *books*. In variety, durability, and facility of attainment, no other can stand in competition with it; and even in intensity it is inferior to few. Imagine that we had it in our power to call up the shades of the greatest and wisest men that ever existed, and obliged them to converse with us on the most interesting topics——what an inestimable privilege should we think it!—how superior to all common enjoyments! But in a well-furnished library we, in fact, possess this power. We can question Xenophon and Cæsar on their campaigns, make Demosthenes and Cicero plead before us, join



In the audiences of Socrates and Plato, and receive demonstrations from Euclid and Newton. In books we have the choicest thoughts of the ablest men in their best dress. We can at pleasure exclude dulness and impertinence, and open our doors to wit and good sense alone. It is needless to repeat the high commendations that have been bestowed on the study of letters by persons, who had free access to every other source of gratification. Instead of quoting Cicero to you, I shall in plain terms give you the result of my own experience on this subject. If domestic enjoyments have contributed in the first degree to the happiness of my life, (and I should be ungrateful not to acknowledge that they have) the pleasures of reading have beyond all question held the second place. Without books I have never been able to pass a single day to my entire satisfaction: with them, no day has been so dark as not to have its pleasure. Even pain and sickness have for a time been charmed away by them. By the easy provision of a book in my pocket, I have frequently worn through long nights and

days in the most disagreeable parts of my profession, with all the difference in my feelings between calm content and fretful impatience. Such occurrences have afforded me full proof both of the possibility of being cheaply pleased, and of the consequence it is of to the sum of human felicity, not to neglect minute attentions to make the most of life as it passes.

Reading may in every sense be called a *cheap* amusement. A *taste for books*, indeed, may be made expensive enough; but that is a taste for editions, bindings, paper and type. If you are satisfied with getting at the sense of an author in some commodious way, a crown at a stall will supply your wants as well as a guinea at a shop. Learn, too, to distinguish between books to be *perused*, and books to be *possessed*. Of the former you may find an ample store in every subscription library, the proper use of which to a scholar is to furnish his mind, without loading his shelves. No apparatus, no appointment of time and place, is necessary for the enjoyment of reading. From the midst of bustle and business you may, in an instant, by the magic of a book, plunge

into scenes of remote ages and countries, and disengage yourself from present care and fatigue. "Sweet pliability of man's spirit, (cries Sterne, on relating an occurrence of this kind in his *Sentimental Journey*) that can at once surrender itself to illusions, which cheat expectation and sorrow of their weary moments!"

The next of the procurable measures that I shall point out to you is that of *conversation*. This is a pleasure of higher zest than that of reading; since in conversing we not only receive the sentiments of others, but impart our own; and from this reciprocation a spirit and interest arise which books cannot give in an equal degree. Fitness for conversation must depend upon the store of ideas laid up in the mind, and the faculty of communicating them. These, in a great degree, are the results of education and the habit of society, and to a certain point they are favoured by superiority of condition. But this is only to a certain point; for when you arrive at that class in which sensuality, indolence, and dissipation, are fostered by excess of opulence, you lose more by di-

minished energy of mind, than you gain by superior refinement of manner and elegance of expression. And, indeed, there are numbers of the higher ranks among us, whose conversation has not even the latter qualities to recommend it, but to poverty of sentiment adds the utmost coarseness of language and behaviour. There is a radical meanness in debauchery, which even in the most elevated conditions of all, communicates the taint of vulgarity. To hear the high-bred party loudly contending in the praises of their dogs and horses, and discussing gambling questions, intermixed with grosser topics, you could not possibly discover by the style and matter, whether you were listening to the masters above, or the grooms below. It is by no means unfrequent to find the *best company*, the *worst conversation*. Should your character and situation for ever exclude you from such societies, you need not repine at your loss. It will be amply compensated by the opportunities you are likely to enjoy of free intercourse with the most cultivated and rational of both sexes, among whom decency of manners and variety of know-

ledge will always be valued, though very moderately decorated with the advantages of fortune.

I would not, however, inculcate too fastidious a taste with respect to the subject and style of conversation, provided it possesses the essentials of sound sense and useful knowledge. Among those who have enjoyed little of the benefit of education, you will often find persons of natural sagacity and a turn for remark, who are capable of affording both entertainment and instruction. Who would not wish to have been acquainted with Franklin when a journeyman printer, even though he had never risen to be one of the most distinguished characters of the age? Information, indeed, may be procured from almost any man in affairs belonging to his particular way of life; and when we fall into company from which little is to be expected with regard to general topics, it is best to give the conversation a turn towards the technical matters with which they may be acquainted, whence some profit may be made out of the most unpromising materials. *Man*, too, in every condition, is a subject well worthy of exa-



mination; and the speculatist may derive much entertainment from observing the manners and sentiments of all the various classes of mankind in their several occupations and amusements.

Another source of cheap pleasure is the *study of nature*. So many advantages with respect to health, tranquillity of mind, useful knowledge and inexhaustible amusement, are united in this study, that I should not fail most warmly to recommend it to your notice, had you not already acquired a decided taste for its pursuits. Here, again, I can speak from my own experience; for the study of English botany caused several summers to glide away with me in more pure and active delight than almost any other single object ever afforded me. It rendered every ride and walk interesting, and converted the plodding rounds of business into excursions of pleasure. From the impression of these feelings, I have ever regarded as perfectly superfluous the pains taken by some of the friends of natural history, to shew its utility in reference to the common purposes of life. Many of their observations, indeed, are true, and may serve to gain



patrons for the study among those who measure every thing by the standard of economical value; but is it not enough to open a source of copious and cheap amusement, which tends to harmonize the mind, and elevate it to worthy conceptions of nature and its author? If I offer a man happiness at an easy rate, unalloyed by any debasing mixture, can I confer on him a greater blessing? Nothing is more favourable to enjoyment than the combination of bodily exertion and ardour of mind. This, the researches of natural history afford in great perfection; and such is the immense variety of its objects, that the labours of the longest life cannot exhaust them.

The study of nature is in itself a cheap study; yet it may be pursued in a very expensive manner, by all the apparatus of cabinets, purchased collections, prints and drawings. But if you will content yourself with the great book of nature and a few of its ablest expositors, together with the riches your own industry may accumulate, you will find enough of it within your compass to answer all reasonable purposes of instruction and amusement.

We are both acquainted with an excellent naturalist\*, who, by a proper application of the time and money he has been able to spare out of a common writing school, has made himself the possessor of more curious and accurate knowledge than falls to the lot of many owners of the most costly treasures. The recollection of his modest merit and scientific content will ever, I am sure, endear to you these fertile stores of cheap delight.

A taste for the sublime and beautiful of nature, as exhibited in her larger works, and resulting from the varied combinations of her external forms, is also productive of many exquisite pleasures, which few persons are at all times precluded from enjoying. To feel these in a supreme degree, a mind enriched by literature and expanded by fancy and reflection is necessary; and, in particular, a high relish for poetry is almost an essential accompaniment. Much pains do not seem requisite in cultivating this species of enjoyment, for it obtrudes itself unsought upon every elegant mind, and the danger is, lest the desire should too soon exhaust

\* Mr. Wigg, of Yarmouth.

its objects. More uneasy longings after what lay beyond my reach, have preyed upon my imagination on reading descriptions of the striking scenes of nature visited by travellers, than on reflecting on all the other advantages which fortune and leisure have to bestow. Yet, certainly, I would not wish to have been less sensible than I am to this source of pleasurable emotions. They may be rendered more distinct and varied, by calling in a taste for what is properly termed the *picturesque*, or a reference of the natural scene to its imitations and improvements by the pencil. But this I conceive to be almost necessarily connected with practical skill in the art of painting; and unless it were made subservient to the purposes of this art, I should apprehend that more might be lost by opening an inlet to fastidious nicety, than would be gained by viewing things with a more learned eye.

This remark would naturally lead me to consider the pleasures to be derived from the practice of ornamental arts, and from the contemplation of their productions in others. But though I am fully sensible of

the pleasing addition these make to the general stock of human enjoyment, yet with respect to most individuals, they scarcely come within the catalogue of cheap pleasures. A taste for them must be formed early in life, must be cultivated with much assiduity, and at considerable expence both of time and money. They are not of all times and places, but require apparatus and opportunity. They are with difficulty kept within bounds, and are continually disposed to desert the easy and simple, in pursuit of what is more complex and elaborate. A taste for music appears to me, as far as I can judge from observation alone, to be eminently of this kind. Where it is marked out by nature, as in some cases it manifestly is, and can be cultivated early and advantageously, it is capable, I doubt not, of affording the most exquisite delights; but then it will probably take place of all other ornamental acquirements. And though such a sacrifice may be worth making under the circumstances described, yet to make it with a view of *creating* a taste for any pursuit merely amusive, is, I think, to estimate falsely the value of things. If, however,

experience shews that musical pleasures may be enjoyed in moderation, and so as to make an agreeable variety, without occupying the place of any thing preferable, my objections are at an end. The same may be said of drawing, and various other tastes and acquisitions, concerning which, accident and inclination, if regulated by prudence, may be suffered to determine the choice.

I have now, I think, pointed out to you sources which will supply sufficient *materials* of easily procurable pleasure, if you bring to them what is absolutely essential to the success of any external means of happiness—a mind in harmony with itself. This, nothing but conscious worth and virtue can bestow. This, “*tibi ipse parabis.*”

Farewell !

## LETTER XXVII,

## ON ATTACHMENT TO COUNTRY.

You, I doubt not, have experienced as well as myself, that one of the earliest passions which discloses itself in a course of liberal education, is Patriotism. In the moral system of the Greeks and Romans, love to country stood so high in the class of duties, that he who reads their writers, and is impressed with admiration of their illustrious characters, cannot fail of regarding it as one of the qualities which most ennoble a man. I well recollect the period, when stories of Curtii and Decii, and the lofty sentences of orators and poets, inculcating the most devoted attachment to country, kindled a flame of enthusiastic rapture in my breast; and I verily believe there was nothing in which I could not have imitated the great exemplars of this virtue. Every thing in a youth which



carries him out of self, and disposes him to make sacrifices to principle, deserves encouragement; but when a duty becomes a passion, it is ever ready to pass its bounds, and encroach upon some other duty equally sacred. In my own case, I confess that I was disposed to go all the lengths of a true Roman; and that the glory and interest of my country became in my eyes paramount to all considerations of general justice and benevolence. I adopted in its full meaning the term *natural enemies*, and in consequence, (as these sentiments were imbibed during the course of a widely-extended war in which we were engaged) heartily hated a great portion of mankind. I am at present shocked at the extremes to which I was carried by this spirit, which certainly was not derived from parental instruction and example. But it will serve to illustrate the power of early impressions; and also to prove, that the imagination being so much more concerned than the reason in forming those impressions, it is of the highest importance in education that proper objects should be put in its way. The influence of these associations continued

with me after better principles ought to have taken its place; and national prejudices of every sort had a long reign over my mind.

Circumstances have probably operated in a different manner upon your feelings; but where a point of great consequence to the formation of character is concerned, it is not right to trust to their casual operation. Let us examine, then, if we cannot discover some determinate principles to regulate our attachment to country. There are two ways in which this affection may exert an influence over us;—as it sways our opinions, and as it directs our conduct.

The opinions of men are perpetually at the mercy of their passions. Esteem and contempt run parallel with love and hatred; and it is as hard to find merit in a foe, as to discover defects in a friend, or, still more, in ourselves. But opinions thus biassed are in reality prejudices, and he whose purpose is the pursuit of truth, cannot too soon get rid of them. In the comparative estimate commonly made of our own and other countries, the grossest of partialities prevail, which, though they

may occasionally prove useful to the community, yet are always degrading to the individual. Lord Chesterfield, in a paper in the *World*, on the use of prejudices, introduces an honest cobbler who, among other similar opinions, entertains a full persuasion that one Englishman can beat three Frenchmen; and his Lordship asks, if it would be right to attempt convincing him that this is an erroneous notion. I shall not meddle with this question; I shall only say, that I do not wish *you* to be the cobbler. I know however, several persons much above his condition, nay even men of learning and talents, who estimate in nearly the same ratio our superiority over other nations, in science, literature, and every other valuable endowment. It is common to say, I am *proud* of being an Englishman. This is an accurate expression, for the emotion of pride has a great concern in these sentiments. In valuing our country, we set a value upon ourselves; and slight grounds serve us for asserting a pre-eminence in which we personally partake. But for that very reason, we ought to suspect the validity of our

conclusions, especially when we see the universal propensity to these local preferences, which cannot *all* be well-founded. Ordinary writers cannot compose a history of the town or county in which they were born, or the school where they learned their grammar, without many ridiculous attempts to give them extraordinary consequence. Having been considerably conversant with topographical publications, I have had an opportunity of observing the workings of this little spirit in all its modes; and nothing has contributed more to make me solicitous in detecting my own prejudices, and labouring for their removal.

If, then, after a sober and accurate enquiry, you should find reason to conclude that your country does not so much excel all others in learning, industry, and liberality as you were inclined to suppose, let no prepossession in its favour because it is *yours*, prevent you from admitting the fact with all its consequences. Rather try to search out the causes which may have impeded our progress, or even occasioned a retrograde motion;—and doubt not that you will thereby render yourself a better

friend to your country, as well as a wiser man, than if you were to persevere in supporting a flattering delusion.

Let me, however, warn you (and myself, at the same time) that there is an opposite source of error. Circumstances may put us in a temporary ill humour with our country; and as the quarrels of kindred are the most inveterate, we may indulge too bitter a resentment on the occasion. In this state of mind, we shall be apt to depreciate her advantages; and think worse of her in every respect than she deserves. In the comparison with other countries, we shall look at her defects alone, and give her rivals credit for more excellence than they really possess. This is not only a very unpleasant disposition to ourselves and others, but leads to error as certainly as the opposite temper. Of one thing, too, we may be well assured—that a country in which our language, habits, and modes of living and thinking have been formed, is better qualified to make *us* happy, than another which may be intrinsically preferable; and therefore the opinions that we have imbibed in its fa-

your are not, with respect to ourselves, errors. If the Greenlander's chief delights are seal fishing and eating whales fat, he does right in refusing to exchange his icy region for a climate more blessed with solar influence.

If we now proceed to consider the *conduct* that a reasonable attachment to country should prescribe, I question not but we shall perfectly agree in the moral principles by which it is to be regulated. It cannot be doubted, that by the distribution which providence has made of mankind into separate communities, connected in a peculiar manner by ties of mutual advantage, a correspondent limitation of the social duties in their general course was intended. Our powers of action being confined, the sphere in which they operate must also have its boundaries. Country is the widest extent to which most men can diffuse the influence of their conduct. We are therefore bound first and preferably to promote the welfare of our country, because we can promote it to more effect than that of any other. But this, I think, is not the only source of our obligations to patriotism.



The debt of gratitude which we have incurred to our country has been very differently estimated by different moralists; nor, perhaps, is it easy to lay down any universal rule for calculating it. That we have breathed her common air, and been received upon her bosom, seems no great matter for obligation—it is rather a debt owing to the Author of nature, than to her. The nurture and education we have had, are, in most cases, the gift of our parents, who have perhaps employed their utmost exertions to procure them for us. We have been protected by the public force; but of this force we ourselves, either by our persons or contributions, have formed a part; and if we have only been secured in the enjoyment of such advantages as the labour of our head or hands might reasonably entitle us to, we may fairly be reckoned to have balanced accounts with our country. Those, indeed, who possess advantages much beyond the common share, for which they contribute nothing adequate in return, and which are held merely through favour of their country's institutions, seem to owe

it peculiar service and attachment. They are pensioners of the state, and are in honour bound to exert themselves in a particular manner for its benefit. The soil which feeds them, as it nourishes the untoiling race of vegetables, may claim their arms at all times for its defence. But it seems enough that one who has done as much for society, as society for him, should comply with those conditions, which the laws under which he continues to live, impose upon him.

These views of the subject are, I think, just, if country be regarded in the abstract, as a kind of geographical idea personified; or if a community be considered as an assemblage of men, totally unconnected in every other respect, than the purpose for the sake of which they have formed their union. But is it not in fact something more? Does not country comprehend all those individuals to whom we lie under every obligation that one human being can incur to another? Cicero says, finely and justly, "*Omnes omnium caritates patria una complexa est.*" I may owe nothing to England, but I owe every thing to Englishmen. When I reflect, that there

scarcely exists on earth an object of my affection and gratitude which this island does not contain, and that all their particular interests are involved in its general interest, can I doubt that here the active duties of my life are centered, and that I ought to wish for, and by all justifiable means to promote, the happiness of those who inhabit this spot of the globe? Thus, the patriotism that I lost by placing it on too extensive but unsound a foundation, I recover again by narrowing and strengthening its basis. It re-appears, indeed, in a form somewhat different. It no longer makes me solicitous for laurels and trophies to decorate the *Genius of Britain*; for well I know how dearly they are paid for out of the comforts of individuals. Still less does it prompt me to wish success to its unjust projects; for I would not desire that my best friend should thrive by such means. But it makes me ardently desirous of my country's improvement in knowledge, virtue, freedom, and the arts of peace; for every advance in these respects must be of real benefit, not only to a large number of my fellow-creatures, but

to that portion of them which includes all whom I love.

If you feel inclined to propose the question, What, upon this system, would become of your patriotism should the majority of your friends be compelled to migrate into another land?—I will anticipate it by freely confessing, that the sentiment would follow them—"Ubi cor, ibi patria." But such an event is inconceivable, unless such principles and practices should come to prevail here, as would justify not only indifference, but aversion, to a self-degraded country. I think I could, without murmuring, or a wish to desert my native soil, submit to the necessary distresses brought on by a decline of its prosperity, though originally occasioned by its own fault, provided it were attended with just sentiments, and melioration of character. But if it should grow more unprincipled as more distressed, and take refuge from the evils of political dissension in voluntary blindness and slavery, I should think every bond cancelled which attached individuals to such a community.

But I will not conclude with so inauspicious a supposition. I rather hope that we shall be permitted to love and esteem our country, as much from reason, as we have done from habit and prejudice. Such, I am sure, must be the wish of every good heart.

Adieu!

## LETTER XXVIII.

## ON INDEPENDENCE.

DEAR SON,

ONE of the principal purposes I had in view when I pointed out to you the sources of cheap pleasure, was to lay a foundation for your *independence* in life. This invaluable possession, which so many avow to be the great object of their lives, yet which so few attain, is well worthy of being made the topic of a separate letter.

Let us first consider how far the idea of independence can be reasonably carried. It was, you know, the boast of ancient philosophy, that by following its precepts, men might attain a felicity over which nothing external had power; and in the high-flown language of Stoicism, the truly wise man was represented as equally sufficient for his own happiness with the Gods them-



selves. If this assertion, when accurately examined, had less of *impiety* than at first sight appears, (since it was founded rather on the imagined elevation of the human mind to an unattainable degree of perfection, than on a débâsement of the divine mind) it was, however, chargeable with originating in false conceptions of the nature and condition of man. In fact, we are incapable, by our utmost efforts, of raising ourselves above the influence of contingencies; and the most essential comforts of our existence will ever be greatly dependent on things *without ourselves*. After all the deductions that the moral satirist could make from our desires on account of their vanity, he could not deny; that the "sound mind in a sound body" was a fit object of petition, since we could not secure it for ourselves. It is further certain, that the social and domestic pleasures, those purest and most satisfactory of all delights, next to that of conscious virtue, are all at the mercy of the persons with whom we live. With how small a share of bodily comforts life might subsist, and still be worth possessing, we have not

been in the way of trying ; but certainly we are not prepared to resign with indifference those we enjoy ; and yet their continuance does not absolutely depend upon our own efforts. No man, therefore, strictly speaking, is independent. The author of our being has connected us by mutual wants to each other ; and has given no one the power of saying, I will be happy in spite of my fellow-creatures. Experience, however, shews, that some men are in a high degree independent compared to others ; and from a superiority in this respect arise some of the noblest prerogatives of the human character.

That man may be said to enjoy independence relatively to other men, who, wants nothing which they can withhold. If either his utility to them is such as to command all the return from them that he wishes, or if what they have to bestow is a thing on which he sets no value, he is in every useful sense independent on them. And if this be his situation with respect to the world in general, he is so far independent on the world. Now an independence of this kind has inestimable advantages. It makes a man walk through life

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erect and fearless, bestows on him all due liberty of speaking and acting, levels before him all the artificial distinctions which keep one human being at a distance from another, and by procuring him his own respect, goes a great way in acquiring for him that of others, or enables him to dispense with it. He who is independent cannot be greater. He looks down on the most prosperous of those, who in the pursuit of wealth and honour enslave themselves to the will of another, and feels an internal dignity to which they can never arrive. In order to induce *him* to act in any particular manner, his reason must be convinced, or his good-will conciliated; whereas the bare command of a superior is to *them* a sufficient motive. The imperious necessities which constrain them on every side, have no force upon him. When Whiston, in the honest frankness of his heart, reproached Sir Richard Steel with giving a vote in parliament contrary to his declared opinion, " Mr. Whiston, (said Sir Richard) you can walk on foot, but I cannot." This was a fair confession of inferiority; and after it, if Steel riding in his chariot could for an instant fancy

himself greater than Whiston on foot, he deserved to forfeit all title to a place among the liberal and enlightened spirits of his time. Whiston, doubtless, knew how to estimate *him*. Poor man! (would he probably say, on seeing him drive by) how low have your *wants* reduced you\*!" Horace has atoned for all his adulation by the independent spirit which continually breaks forth in his works, and which led him, in one of his epistles to Mæcenas, very plainly to hint that he was ready to resign all he had conferred upon him, rather than give up his free-agency.

Hac ego si compellar imagine, cuncta resigno.

But I need not longer dwell upon the value of independence; let us proceed to enquire how it is to be obtained.

\* Whiston was probably in another sense the most independent of the two. The poet Linieres, says Menage, being reproached with always walking on foot, replied extempore in the following epigram.

Je vois d'illustres cavaliers  
Avec laquais, carosse & pages:  
Mais ils doivent leurs equipages,  
Et je ne dois pas mes souliers.

In the first place, it certainly is not the necessary result of a man's absolute situation in life. Raise his rank and fortune as high as you please, if his ambition, avarice, or love of pleasure, rise beyond them, he becomes as dependent as the wretch who receives his daily bread at the will of a master. Nay, so much does the habit of looking for remote and elaborate sources of enjoyment gain upon the disposition, and surpass all common means of gratification, that the highest ranks have in almost all countries been distinguished by their superior servility. In the most brilliant periods of the French monarchy, there was not a person of quality whose whole existence did not depend upon the nod of the court; and though almost uncontrouled lords of wide domains abounding with delights, a cold look at the levee froze every spring of pleasure in their souls. That a man was nothing in France but for the king, and by the king, (*pour le roi, et par le roi*) came to be the received maxim; and no methods were thought too mean for the haughtiest of mortals to employ, in order to preserve their interest at court. Very vain, there-

fore, it is to propose independence as the prize of a life spent in the successful practice of "stooping to rise." The object is lost in the pursuit, for its true seat is in the *mind*.

To be content with a little, and to secure that little by the exertions of useful industry, is the only certain method of becoming independent. Both these points must concur; for neither can the wants of life, however few, be supplied by ourselves without industry; nor can this quality alone procure content. The Indian fakier who sits all day with his arms indissolubly knit, to receive the food that devotees put into his mouth, is no more independent than the bustling miser of Horace, who runs to the Indies through fear of the demon of poverty. Those, however, who have made the cultivation of their minds the great object of life, have chiefly pursued the plan of contracting their desires, and forcing nature to be satisfied with as few things as possible; for, considering all the time as lost which was spent upon providing for bodily wants, they began with bringing these into the smallest compass in their power. This



was the discipline of the most celebrated among the ancient philosophers, of which your reading will suggest to you many remarkable examples. Some were, no doubt, actuated by vanity in this matter, and made an ostentatious display of their superiority to common wants and desires; yet it cannot be denied, that the highest characters of antiquity, men who not only harranged in the schools, but acted upon the great theatre of the world, were much indebted to habits of abstinence and frugality for their greatness. Many of the most illustrious Greeks, and all the Romans of the first ages, were rendered superior to the allurements of prosperity and the threats of adversity, by the possession of an independence of mind founded on the abstemious virtues.

The ascetics of the Christian church have perhaps carried this plan farther than any of the heathen philosophers; and though the general principle of these mortifications has been abject superstition, yet they have enabled some of the more active among the monastic orders to overcome difficulties, in the way of their religious zeal, which the most ardent courage, not

inured to such discipline, must have sunk under. Individuals in these societies, confiding in their ability of sustaining all the hardships that men any where sustain, and of subsisting upon as little as they any where subsist upon, have penetrated in their missions into regions inaccessible to other natives of a civilized country, and have struck even savages with admiration of their patience and temperance. Even in the midst of power and splendour, some of them, like Ximenes, have practised all the austere regimen of the cloister; and thence have been capable of defying every thing that a change of fortune could inflict upon them. How many at this day are probably receiving the benefit of habits of enjoying life upon a little! It is unpleasant to reflect, that a class of men who have been able to free themselves to such a degree from subjection to corporeal demands, should yet submit without resistance to the most imperious despotism exercised over their minds.

But it would be absurd to propose to one who is destined to live in cultivated society, and to form a part of it, an independence founded on renunciation of the

common comforts and pleasures of life. Had you strength of mind to attain to this, I certainly should not wish it for you, unless it were necessary to enable you to accomplish some point of high utility to mankind—which, in your case, is a very improbable supposition. But what I do wish, is, that you may as much as possible become the master of your own happiness—that you may ever value that true dignity of character which consists in the free assertion of principle, beyond all the petty objects of gratification to which it is so commonly sacrificed—and that you be content with such a share of the goods of fortune, as your industry and usefulness may fairly purchase. I do not desire for you that proud independence of spirit which is disposed to reject as an insult the kind offices of honourable friendship. You will, I trust, possess qualifications which may entitle you to these, without incurring a debt of gratitude beyond the power of equally honourable services to repay. And it has ever been my sentiment, that one who is ready to confer benefits on his inferiors in condition, needs not, nay has no

right, to scruple accepting them from his superiors. Every generous mind feels that no pleasure equals that of conferring favours on the deserving: this pleasure, therefore, as it is eagerly coveted, should be cheerfully imparted. With respect to your professional labours, there is little doubt that they will be worthy of their reward. Whatever additional advantages your situation may afford you, it will, I hope, be in your power to compensate for them by additional exertions to bestow pleasure and profit on those with whom you are connected. Many animating examples will present themselves to you, of persons in your station, beloved, respected, and served, who have yet never in their lives derogated from a manly independence of character. But all these have been persons of moderate desires, as well as of active industry. And from every thing I have seen of the world, I am convinced, that more is to be done towards obtaining happiness in general, and its precious ingredient, freedom of action, in particular, by contracting the bounds of our wishes, than by the utmost extension of our powers in filling a plan of unlimited

enjoyment. This, I believe is not fashionable doctrine; but it is that which the experience of my own heart suggests. It would too, I am sure, have been supported by the suffrage of your grandfather\*, whose memory I know you so justly revere. Though by no means what is called a high-spirited man, he preserved during life an honourable independence, by the simple method of making nothing essential to his happiness which did not come within the reach of his useful and low-priced services. I wish you better health, stronger spirits, and perhaps more encouragement from the world, than he had;—more knowledge, superior talents, higher worth, and a more truly philosophic temper, I need not wish you, though paternal affection is little inclined to be a niggard in its wishes.

Adieu!

\* The late Rev, Dr. Aikin, of Warrington,

## L E T T E R    XXIX.

## ON THE CHOICE OF A WIFE.

DEAR SON,

THERE is no species of advice which seems to come with more peculiar propriety from parents to children, than that which respects the marriage state; for it is a matter in which the first must have acquired some experience, and the last cannot. At the same time, it is found to be that in which advice produces the least effect. For this, various causes may be assigned; of which, no doubt, the principal is, that passion commonly takes this affair under its management, and excludes reason from her share of the deliberation. I am inclined to think, however, that the neglect with which admonitions on this head are treated, is not unfrequently owing to the manner in which they are given,



which is often too general, too formal, and with too little accommodation to the feelings of young persons. If, in descanting a little upon this subject, I can avoid these errors, I flatter myself you are capable of bestowing some unforced attention to what an affectionate desire of promoting your happiness, in so essential a point may prompt.

The difference of opinion between sons and fathers in the matrimonial choice may be stated in a single position—that the former have in their minds the first month of marriage, the latter, the whole of its duration. Perhaps you will, and with justice, deny that this is the difference between us two, and will assert that you, as well as I, in thinking of this connexion, reflect on its lasting consequences. So much the better! We are then agreed as to the mode in which it is to be considered, and I have the advantage of you only in experience and more extensive observation.

I need say little as to the share that personal charms ought to have in fixing a choice of this kind. While I readily admit, that it is desirable, that the object on

which the eyes are most frequently to dwell for a whole life, should be an agreeable one; you will probably as freely acknowledge, that more than this is of too fanciful and fugitive a nature to come into the computation of permanent enjoyment. Perhaps in this matter I might look more narrowly for you, than you would for yourself, and require a suitableness of years and vigour of constitution, which might continue this advantage to a period that you do not yet contemplate. But dropping this part of the subject, let us proceed to consider the two main points on which the happiness to be expected from a female associate in life must depend—her qualifications as a *companion*, and as a *helper*.

Were you engaged to make a voyage round the world on the condition of sharing a cabin with an unknown messmate, how solicitous would you be to discover his character and disposition before you set sail! If, on enquiry, he should prove to be a person of good sense and cultivated manners, and especially of a temper inclined to please and be pleased, how fortunate would you think yourself! But if, in addition to this, his tastes, studies, and

opinions, should be found conformable to yours, your satisfaction would be complete. You could not doubt that the circumstance which brought you together, would lay the foundation of an intimate and delightful friendship. On the other hand, if he were represented, by those who thoroughly knew him, as weak, ignorant, obstinate and quarrelsome, of manners and dispositions totally opposite to your own, you would probably rather give up your project, than submit to live so many months confined with such an associate.

Apply this comparison to the domestic companion of the voyage of life—the intimate of all hours—the partaker of all fortunes—the sharer in pain and pleasure—the mother and instructress of your offspring. Are you not struck with a sense of the infinite consequence it must be of to you, what are the qualities of the heart and understanding of one who stands in this relation; and of the comparative insignificance of external charms and ornamental accomplishments! But as it is scarcely probable that all you would wish in these particulars can be obtained, it is of importance to ascertain which qualities

are the most essential, that you may make the best compromise in your power. Now, tastes, manners and opinions, being things not original, but acquired, cannot be of so much consequence as the fundamental properties of good sense and good temper. Possessed of these, a wife who loves her husband will fashion herself in the others according to what she perceives to be his inclination; and if, after all, a considerable diversity remain between them in such points, this is not incompatible with domestic comfort. But sense and temper can never be dispensed with in the companion for life: they form the basis on which the whole edifice of happiness is to be raised. As both are absolutely essential, it is needless to enquire which is so in the highest degree. Fortunately, they are oftener met with together than separate; for the just and reasonable estimation of things which true good sense inspires, almost necessarily produces that equanimity and moderation of spirit in which good-temper properly consists. There is, indeed, a kind of thoughtless good nature which is not unfrequently coupled with weakness of understanding; but having

no power of self-direction, its operations are capricious, and no reliance can be placed on it in promoting solid felicity. When, however, this easy humour appears with the attractions of youth and beauty, there is some danger lest even men of sense should overlook the defects of a shallow capacity, especially if they have entertained the too common notion, that women are no better than playthings, designed rather for the amusement of their lords and masters, than for the more serious purposes of life. But no man ever married a fool without severely repenting it ; for though the pretty trifler may have served well enough for the hour of dalliance and gaiety, yet when folly assumes the reins of domestic, and especially of parental, controul, she will give a perpetual heart-ache to a considerate partner.

On the other hand, there are to be met with instances of considerable powers of the understanding, combined with waywardness of temper, sufficient to destroy all the comfort of life. Malignity is sometimes joined with wit, haughtiness and caprice with talents, sourness and suspicion



with sagacity, and cold reserve with judgment. But all these being in themselves unamiable qualities, is it less necessary to guard against the possessors of them. They generally render even beauty unattractive; and no charm but that of fortune is able to overcome the repugnance they excite. How much more fatal than even folly they are to all domestic felicity, you have probably already seen enough of the matrimonial state to judge.

Many of the qualities which fit a woman for a companion, also adapt her for the office of a *helper*; but many additional ones are requisite. The original purpose for which this sex was created, is said, you know, to have been, providing man with a *help-mate*; yet it is perhaps, that notion of a wife which least occupies the imagination in the season of courtship. Be assured, however, that as an office for *life*, its importance stands extremely high to one whose situation does not place him above the want of such aid; and fitness for it should make a leading consideration in his choice. Romantic ideas of domestic felicity will infallibly in time give way to that true state of things, which will shew



that a large part of it must arise from well ordered affairs, and an accumulation of petty comforts and conveniences. A clean and quiet fire side, regular and agreeable meals, decent apparel, a house managed with order and economy, ready for the reception of a friend or the accommodation of a stranger, a skilful as well as affectionate nurse in time of sickness—all these things compose a very considerable part of what the nuptial state was intended to afford us; and without them, no charms of person or understanding will long continue to bestow delight. The arts of housewifery should be regarded as *professional* to the woman who intends to become a wife; and to select one for that station who is destitute of them, or disinclined to exercise them, however otherwise accomplished, is as absurd, as it would be to choose for your lawyer or physician a man who excelled in every thing rather than in law or physic.

Let me remark, too, that knowledge and good-will are not the only requisites for the office of a helper. It demands a certain energy both of body and mind which

is less frequently met with among the females of the present age than might be wished. How much soever infirm and delicate health may interest the feelings, it is certainly an undesirable attendant on a connexion for life. Nothing can be more contrary to the qualification of a help-mate, than a condition which constantly requires that assistance which it never can impart. It is, I am sure, the farthest thing from my intention to harden your heart against impressions of pity, or slacken those services of affectionate kindness by which you may soften the calamitous lot of the most amiable and deserving of the species. But a matrimonial choice is a choice for your own benefit, by which you are to obtain additional sources of happiness; and it would be mere folly in their stead voluntarily to take upon you new incumbrances and distresses. Akin to an unnerved frame of body, is that shrinking timidity of mind, and excessive nicety of feeling, which is too much encouraged under the notion of female delicacy. That this is carried beyond all reasonable bounds in modern education, can scarcely be doubted by one who considers what exertions of fortitude

and self-command are continually required in the course of female duty. One who views society closely, in its interior as well as its exterior, will know that occasions of alarm, suffering and disgust come much more frequently in the way of women than of men. To them belong all offices about the weak, the sick, and the dying. When the house becomes a scene of wretchedness from any cause, the man often runs abroad, the woman must stay at home and face the worst. All this takes place in cultivated society, and in classes of life raised above the common level. In a savage state, and in the lower conditions, women are compelled to undergo even the most laborious, as well as the most disagreeable tasks. If nature, then, has made them so weak in temper and constitution as many suppose, she has not suited means to ends with the foresight we generally discover in her plans.

I confess myself decidedly of the opinion of those who would rather form the two sexes to a resemblance of character, than contrast them. Virtue, wisdom, presence of mind, patience, vigour, capacity, application, are not *sexual* quali-

ties: they belong to mankind—to all who have duties to perform and evils to endure. It is surely a most degrading idea of the female sex, that they must owe their influence to trick and finesse, to counterfeit or real weakness. They are too essential to our happiness to need such arts; too much of the pleasure and of the business of the world depends upon them, to give reason for apprehension that we shall cease to join partnership with them. Let them aim at excelling in the qualities peculiarly adapted to the parts they have to act, and they may be excused from affected languor and coquetry. We shall not think them less amiable for being our best helpers.

Having thus endeavoured to give you just ideas of the principal requisites in a wife, especially in a wife for one in your condition, I have done all that lies within the compass of an adviser. From the influence of passion I cannot guard you: I can only deprecate its power. It may be more to the purpose to dissuade you from *hasty engagements*, because in making them, a person of any resolution is not to be regarded as merely passive. Though the head has lost its rule over the heart, it may

retain its command of the hand. And surely if we are to pause before any action, it should be before one on which "all the colour of remaining life" depends. Your reason must be convinced, that to form a solid judgment of so many qualities as are requisite in the conjugal union, is no affair of days and weeks, of casual visits or public exhibitions. Study your object at *home*—see her tried in her proper department. Let the progress be, liking, approving, loving, and lastly, declaring; and may you, after the experience of as many years as I have had, be as happily convinced, that a choice so formed is not likely to deceive!

You may think it strange, that I have not touched upon a consideration which generally takes the lead in parental estimates of matrimonial views—that of *fortune*. But I have been treating on the *woman* only, not on any thing extraneous to her. Fortune acquired with a wife, is the same thing as fortune got any other way. It has its value, and certainly no small one in procuring the desirable comforts of life; and to rush into a state in which wants will be greatly increased



without a reasonable prospect of being able to supply those wants, is an act, not merely of carelessness, but of downright folly. But with respect to the sources whence their supply is to be sought, that is a particular enquiry to each individual; and I do not think so ill of your prudence as to apprehend that you will not give it all the attention its importance demands. Another consideration, that of the *family connexions* formed by marriage is of a similar kind. Its great importance cannot be doubted; but it is an affair to be determined on by the dictates of common prudence, just as in forming those connexions after any other mode; though, indeed, in no other can they be formed equally strong. One who is master of his deliberations, may be trusted to decide these points, as well as any others that occur in the practice of life. That your decisions may always shew you to be possessed of a due power of self-direction, is the earnest wish of

Your truly affectionate, &c.



## LETTER XXX.

## VALEDICTORY.

AND now, my dear Son, I feel it time to close this series of letters; not that subjects are exhausted, but that other things demand my attention. You will perceive that their topics, so far as they relate to morals and the conduct of life, have been of a kind, supplementary to those instructions which you have received in a systematic way from books and lectures. Of such instructions it was the chief purpose to establish *principles*—a point of most essential consequence, which I hope and believe has been sufficiently secured in your education. My view in writing was rather to place in a strong and familiar light some subordinate truths belonging to

the experimental practice of life, which, though not of the fundamental importance of the former, yet are of no small weight in promoting a man's happiness and utility. With respect to the letters relative to points of taste and literature, it has been their chief aim to obviate prejudices, and to give that turn to your thoughts which might enable you to judge and to enjoy for yourself, without first appealing to the decision of a dictator. For freedom of thinking is the same thing in matters of greater and of smaller moment; and though I hold it of little consequence *how* a person is pleased, provided he be innocently so, yet I would not wish him, even in his pleasures, implicitly to follow the decrees of custom and authority, lest it should induce a habit of the same passive compliance in affairs of capital importance. But I need say no more concerning the drift of letters which, I should hope, sufficiently explain themselves, and do not ill correspond to my favourite motto, of "free sentiments in simple language."

It has happened, that the termination of this epistolary commerce, is also the

period of your finally quitting the paternal roof, and launching out into professional life. What an interesting period to us both! How extensive a field of action now opens to your view! What duties to be performed—what lessons to be learned—what new connexions to be formed, and new scenes to be engaged in! How much attention will be requisite in order to avoid being in some measure bewildered in the variety of objects that will present themselves to you; and how much will it behove you to fix your eyes steadfastly on the two cardinal points of *duty* and *improvement*! You will meet with (doubt it not!) fires of various kinds to tempt you out of your course. Be on your guard against them all, and principally against the “improbable fires of *desidia*”—for that is the charmer whose voice has ever proved most ensnaring to those of your profession. Many and many admonitions and counsels should I add, were my pen to utter all my heart conceives on this occasion—but to prepare you for it is not, I trust, a busi-

ness now to do. To yourself I commit you, with "Providence your guide." My dear Arthur, a long farewell!

Your most affectionate

friend and father,

J. A.

LONDON, NOV. 8, 1793.

THE END.







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